

The University of Chicago

AMERICAN CRITICISM OF BRITISH
DECADENCE, 1880-1900

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE
1937

By
ROBERT MOORE LIMPUS

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CHAPTER II
CRITICISM OF BRITISH AUTHORS
IN AMERICAN PERIODICALS

Probably more than ever before in the history of American culture, English fiction was devoured by American readers during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. An examination of the monthly lists of best sellers in the Bookman, gathered from booksellers in the principal cities all over the country, shows that a great many novels that were successful in England were republished, either by arrangement or not, in America and were read from coast to coast. Before the passing of the International Copyright Law, it was much safer for American publishers to reprint proved British books than to take risks with manuscripts by comparatively unknown fellow-countrymen.¹ This was true to an even greater extent with periodicals, which during the seventies and eighties depended heavily on serialized installments of novels by George Eliot, Meredith, Blackmore, and Hardy for serious fiction. Poetry was in the same predicament. The American poets of the Cambridge school (dead or alive) were firmly entrenched and were, on the whole, more comprehensible to American readers than contemporary British poets;² but Kipling was very popular, and, because of the interest in light verse in the nineties, foreign poets like Austin Dobson were read. The mid-century giants,

¹F. L. Pattee, The New American Literature (New York: Century Company, 1930), p. 14.

²The Nation said that the period was one of "well-trained mediocrity" (XLIV [September 29, 1887], 259).

Nation, XLII (May 27, 1886), 449: "Now that Emerson and Longfellow are gone, Tennyson and Browning have it all their own way as regards contemporary fame; and the most ardent Americans will not grudge them precedence over Holmes, Whittier, and Lowell. Let the two great Englishmen die tomorrow, and the same precedence would by no means be conceded to Swinburne and Morris, but the star-spangled banner would assert itself; let all these die and it is 'anybody's race.'"

Tennyson and Browning, were, of course, well known, particularly the latter, who was the object of an amazing amount of attention, especially from small town local-culture societies. Stedman deplored the rise of Browning societies and the pseudo-scholarship which they produced.

The like of it has not been witnessed since the days of the neo-Platonists and grammarians every mercantile town, from London to the farthest outpost of the western continent, has its central Browning Society, from which dependents radiate like the little spiders that spin their tiny strands near the maternal web.¹

In the following discussion of the periodical criticism of the British aesthetic and decadent writers, it is, of course, impossible within the limits of this dissertation to give more than a sampling. Care has been taken, however, that the sampling should be representative, and not merely the sporadic or eccentric verdicts of isolated critics, unless cited as such. In general, the Atlantic was most inclined to academic conservatism. Harper's, the Critic, the Nation, Scribner's and the Century were much more conservative than otherwise. The Dial and the Chap-book, Chicago publications, were likely to occupy a middle position or frankly to champion foreign tendencies. Harry Thurston Peck's Bookman was likely to occupy any position from conservatism to decadence.

The earlier works of Pater were apparently little known in America. It was only after aestheticism had been talked about that reviewers took note of his importance. The Atlantic, for instance, passed over The Renaissance with brief remarks to the effect that Pater possessed a pleasant style, agreeably the opposite of Ruskin's. The reviewer believed that his use of the term "Renaissance" was too vague, and that it was only in the essay on Winckelmann that one could be sure what he was talking about.² It was seventeen years later that the Atlantic returned to Pater somewhat more appreciatively: "The fact that this book [The Renaissance] has been fifteen years in reaching a third edition is not flattering to English taste."³ The general opinion concerning Appreciations was unfavorable. The Dial criticized it

¹Victorian Poets (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), 430-31.

²XXXII (October, 1873), 498.

³Ibid., LXV (March, 1890), 425.

chiefly for its style: "It is well to study style, and be able adroitly to discourse on style; and then it is well to lose sight of style, and not remind your reader too perpetually of the medium through which he perceives your thought. Mr. Pater . . . has become Latinized."¹ The Atlantic and the Nation dissented, the former believing that Pater's "fault of excessive sensibility and high culture in the aesthetic direction, has steadily grown less with years, and what now remains of it contributes more to the excellence than it detracts from the perfect taste of his work."² The reviewer for the Nation wrote that the material and point of view in Appreciations was old and familiar material, but that Pater's presentation was admirable.³

Marius the Epicurean was received better. In no case did a critic take it seriously as a guide for living, and usually its highly rarified style was the object for unfavorable comment, but in almost every case it was judged nearly perfect in its class. The Dial reviewer called it "a classic if there ever was one," without, however, indicating that it should be treated otherwise than to be placed behind glass doors with other "classics."⁴ The Atlantic was moderately enthusiastic:

. . . there is very little objective character to it. The persons and scenes are faintly sketched. . . .

This absence of a strongly marked background, from which the characters are to be projected, is detrimental to any sharp outline in the figures of the persons themselves. . . .

Mr. Pater's style has become even more delicate than it was shown to be in his Studies in the History of the Renaissance. His sentences slip along with the noiseless murmur of a brook.

The possibility of parallels with contemporary life was noticed, as, for example, a young Roman host: "He wore it [a toga] . . . with the grace becoming the leader of a thrilling movement then on foot for the restoration of that disused garment, in which, laying aside all the customary evening dress, all the visitors were requested to appear, setting off the dainty sinuosities and well-disposed 'golden way' of its folds with harmoniously tinted

¹C. A. L. Richards in Dial, XI (June, 1890), 38.

²Atlantic, LXV (March, 1890), 425.

³XLIX (December 26, 1889), 523.

⁴XVII (August 16, 1894), 84.

flowers." The reviewer quoted at length the advice given Marius by the young priest in the temple of Hermes, and recognized it as the philosophy of Pater himself:

Let us—not eat and drink, but feel unutterable things, for tomorrow we die, is the refrain of this remarkable book,—remarkable for its delicacy of observation, its frequent penetration and illuminating reflection, its harmonious art, its aroma. Is it from too crass a nature that we are tempted sometimes to wish for some boulder of truth to come crashing down into the hothouse of flower and verdure? The very refinement of the book, too long lingered over, creates a revulsion of feeling, and we almost are willing to see someone do injustice to it. Not quite this. We owe Mr. Pater too great a debt for this rarity of literature. We are content to take it for what it is, a consummate piece of art, not a masterly commentary upon the latter half of the second century.¹

George E. Woodberry, reviewing for the Nation, read the book with the typical nineteenth century bias for an ideal of service. He was surprised, however, "in perceiving in the evangel of aestheticism a morality of this height. . . ." Marius' life was "not a vital one, but a painted one"; he was too inactive, and one saw "love operative in him very seldom." "His whole life was a meditatio mortis—that is all that is told us."

A sense of failure, or rather incompleteness, oppresses one when he lays down the volumes. Even granted the success Marius is said to have achieved—one is never quite sure that he did—by that exquisite appreciation of beauty and impassioned contemplation of its ideal forms, was, in fact, his, yet of what worth was it—what did it mean to either God or man? The northern idealist, the Puritan, cannot dispense with some serviceableness as essential to any high living.²

Jeanette Gilder of the Critic could not entirely dissociate the book from the hated aesthetic point of view:

Popular opinion regards Walter Pater as the parent of Oscar Wilde and the lackadaisical, lisping writers caricatured in "Patience." He is thought to have carried refinement to the point where it ceases to be a grace. Even his "Marius the Epicurean" is held by some to depict life with no more truth than the smooth, soft steel engravings of the mid-century magazines. Not only his style, but the character of his admirations, gave Pater his reputation for affected sentimentality. While deprecating these exaggerations, we may admit that a certain morbidez reveals itself in some of his work.³

¹Atlantic, LVI (August, 1885), 274-77.

²Nation, XLI (September 10, 1885), 219-21.

³Critic, XXVI (February 9, 1895), 95.

Concerning the Pre-Raphaelites before 1882, Americans had very vague notions.¹ As has been described, there had been a revival of interest in the arts of interior decoration in which the term "Pre-Raphaelite" was used considerably, but seldom accurately. The literary implications of the movement were even more a matter of conjecture, and about the only characteristic term upon which critics agreed as belonging to the movement was "fleshly." D. G. Rossetti's death in 1882, the appearance of Ballads and Sonnets, and mention of his name by Oscar Wilde brought forth some comments. Edmund Gosse contributed an article about him to the Century.² Harper's suddenly presented a rather extravagant eulogy:

Those—and there are such—who couple this man's name with the idle worshipper of peacocks' feathers created by Mr. Du Maurier should pause before giving judgment, and remember the mere quantity of work accomplished in his short lifetime. . . . If the later school [latter phase of Pre-Raphaelitism] had any set of principles, it was the same immortal code that Sappho used, and Phidias, Spenser, and Titian, Keats, Coleridge, and all musicians, always have studied—the love of beauty for its own sake, the love of color, passion, and sweet sound. . . .³

The "fleshly" theme continued in the Atlantic's appraisal:

In contemplating the wonder and fairness of the body, he was doubtless aware of a perception in himself that reached out towards the most subtle and refined significance of what he beheld; and, to convey this, what more natural than that he should depict in the most glowing words the physical presence that awoke such a perception? But, in doing so, he frequently lost the spiritual significance, and some readers saw nothing in the result but a "fleshly" picture. We have not the least thought of accusing his intention, but we think that, owing to his overstrained sensibility, his execution laid him fairly open to misunderstanding. Beauty became his disease.⁴

Concerning Ballads and Sonnets, the Harper's review is characteristic. The technique was praised, but the content was considered shallow. "Elaborately and even elegantly finished

¹Longfellow called upon D. G. Rossetti, but evinced little knowledge of painting as an art, and also made the mistake of supposing that it was Rossetti's brother who was the poet (Atlantic, LI [April, 1883], 553).

²II (September, 1882), 718-25.

³Harper's, LXV (October, 1882), 695-97.

⁴Review of biography by Hall Caine in Atlantic, LI (April, 1883), 551.

specimens of the art of poetic feigning, for the most part their emotion is manufactured, their passions pretended, their sentiment cold and artificial, and their style and language stilted and enigmatical."¹ Miss Gilder thought that Rossetti's painting had had an unhealthy effect upon contemporary English art,² and R. H. Stoddard, writing in her magazine, considered him responsible for the degeneracy of English verse.

Rossetti is the intellectual sire of Morris, Swinburne, Gosse, Lang—the whole band of living English warblers, of whom the best are merely mocking-birds. . . . It is severe, no doubt, to call all English verse rubbish, but rubbish it is, and it is shot largely upon us here in America. Could Dante Gabriel Rossetti have foreseen what was to happen, he would scarcely have written his *Helens*, *Liliths*, and other serpentine witches.³

The *Nation* was gratified that *Ballads and Sonnets* contained "no new morbidity," and commented on the commonly-conceived relationship between Whitman and the "fleshly" poets of England; "Extremes often meet, and many of Mr. Whitman's admirers are also enamored of the peculiarly hot-house atmosphere of Mr. Rossetti."⁴ In 1896, the *Atlantic* published Rossetti's letters in four installments, edited by George Birckbeck Hill.⁵ In general, Christina Rossetti received greater commendation than her brother; the *Atlantic* declared that there was more freshness, simplicity, and originality in her *Pageant and Other Poems* than in Dante Gabriel's *Ballads and Sonnets*.⁶ Several years later the *Bookman* published a very appreciative article about her by Katherine Tynan Hinkson,⁷ and an *Atlantic* writer called her "one of the saintliest of women, as well as one of our finest poets."⁸

Swinburne's poems sold well in America, especially during

¹*Harper's*, LXIV (February, 1882), 473.

²*Critic*, III (February 3, 1883), 42.

³*Ibid.* (April 22, 1882), 116.

⁴*Nation*, XXXIII (December 15, 1881), 447.

⁵LXXVII, LXXVIII (May, June, July, and August).

⁶*Atlantic*, XLIX (January, 1882), 121.

⁷*Bookman*, I (February, 1895), 28-29.

⁸William Sharp, "Some Recollections of Christina Rossetti," *Atlantic*, LXXV (June, 1895), 736.

the nineties. In 1894 there were two American editions of his works within six months. In spite of the fact that the Dial¹ hailed Swinburne's as the "greatest name among all of those poets now living," the prevalent attitude toward him was one of rather playfully wicked curiosity. In his early youth he had written poems which were reputed to be wildly sensual, and usually critics, like Stedman, who had good words for him, made it plain that they were not referring to those youthful aberrations. Scribner's was not favorable to Songs of Springtime:

It is filled to overflowing with the stuff out of which poetry is made, but it is not poetry. It is a wilderness of magnificent language, besprinkled with vehement phrases,-- a sea of sonorous measures, surging hither and thither in billows of rhythm; but it signifies nothing. . . .

It is wearisome in its wordiness and exhaustive in its obscurity. We try to persuade ourselves that we understand it, but, after reading a few pages of it, we give up in despair. . . . The faith of reason has gone. . . . It is an age of unreason, and Swinburne has become one of its prophets.²

The Nation complained that Swinburne had too much gospel to preach, "a gospel now very well known, and in its stark form become, through persistent satire, sufficiently ridiculous. . . . Mr. Swinburne's preachment of it has been too distinctly polemical to be thoroughly poetic." The reviewer was of the opinion that Swinburne had never written anything better, but believed that "no one will fail to see that even when, as here, he is most impersonal his verse is admirable for its sensuousness, its intensity, its fine form, and not particularly valuable for the thought with which it is freighted."

In these 'Songs of the Springtides,' therefore, it is interesting to note that Mr. Swinburne has, as it seems to us, made a distinct effort to exercise his intelligence as a stimulant and guide of and check upon his impetuous genius . . . even here, however, the usual surfeit of assonance and alliteration has a little the air of a perfunctory reliance upon a mannerism now grown easy and habitual instead of, as formerly, the air of glorying and exulting in extravagance.³

Studies in Song, the Nation thought, was labored and hackneyed. "The enthusiasm which may justify poetic frenzy is

¹XXXI (September 1, 1896), 119.

²Scribner's, XX (October, 1880), 943.

³Nation, XXX (June 17, 1880), 458.

lacking. . . . The more Mr. Swinburne gives us of this, the more it is borne in upon a reflective mind that a little goes a long way."¹ Lochrine showed his resources of rhythm and alliteration, but "no strong grasp of character."² Mary Stuart was criticized principally because it was not in Swinburne's usual vein.

. . . . the prevailing fault of the poem is that, not merely in its allusions, but in its execution, it is utterly un-Swinburne-like. The exquisite beauty that marked "Chastelard," and that lent a charm to even its cloying descriptions and its quite unquestionable moral; those striking images, and those passionate thrills, and those delicious French and English songs that lay like pressed flowers among the pages—all these have disappeared and have left a monotonous masculine treatment, carrying with it a certain power, but no charm. It is evident that this poet, like certain painters, is to be regarded as having an earlier manner and a later manner; and it is to be hoped, for the sake of good morals, that his readers will never wish him back in his unregenerate days.³

Tristram of Lyonesse and Other Poems received equally bad treatment:

There is no probability of his ceasing to write as long as the patience of his readers lasts; it is the latter which will fail him rather than his gift of song, which literally appears to be endless. There was a time when we thought we liked it, but we have since concluded that we were mistaken. We were captivated by its novelty, its rhythm, its boldness; and we must have overrated it on this account; we were certainly not captivated by its intellectual value. . . .⁴

The Atlantic reviewed A Midsummer Holiday and Other Poems rather favorably, but was afraid that Swinburne's powers were flagging: ". . . there is a lack of vigor, a lassitude of the imaginative faculty, a paucity even of fancy, in which he was once so fluent."⁵ Stedman, who had done a great deal to introduce Swinburne in America, confessed that "his metrical genius is too specific, too enthralling, to be overlong endured. Thus, the distinctive tone, however beautiful, which soonest compels attention, as quickly

¹Ibid., XXXII (February 10, 1881), 98.

²Ibid., XLVI (May 17, 1888), 411.

³Ibid., XXXIV (April 27, 1882), 360.

⁴Critic, II (August 12, 1882), 210.

⁵Atlantic, LV (April, 1885), 564.

satiates the public. The subjective poets who restrict their fertility, or who die young, are those whom the world canonized before their bones are dust."¹ Stoddard said in his introduction to Selections from Swinburne that Swinburne was "exceedingly narrow, obscure, and tedious"; that he had "written no line that lingers in the memory," and had uttered "nothing that resembled a thought"; that "this could not have been the case if he had been gifted with unusual mental endowments."²

William Morris was far better known for his wall-papers than for his poetry, the medievalism of which was not to American taste. A view of certain pessimistic statements in Hopes and Fears for Art is characteristic of a prevalent American idea concerning the somber quality of so much European writing. If the writers in question had only lived in the United States, or some other democratic country, they might be more companionable, but living as they did under the effete survival of an outworn feudal system, it was little wonder that they were frequently melancholy. The Century said that this particular melancholia on the part of Morris was merely "the Morris phase of the British privilege of grumbling."

Morris wall-papers had invaded Anglo-Saxondom to such an extent that the classic bar-rooms of Leadville exhibited their peculiar designs above Eastlake dados.

Others of the famous band to which Mr. Morris belongs have done more bragging and far less effective work. [Ruskin and Rossetti] have had more power in swaying Mr. Morris's ideas than is healthful; they have encouraged him in the national malady of discontent, which itself undoubtedly rises from the national malady of misgovernment. . . . It may be the prejudice of a foreigner that attributes these remarkable results [discontent and complaining] to the unhealthy and anomalous state of affairs in the Mother Country, which still permits a dull and often immoral upper class to distribute fashions in politics, literature, and art, and to keep alienated and deprived of their rightful weight in public affairs and private society the strongest, healthiest, and cleverest portions of the population in the British Empire. It is this note that Mr. Oscar Wilde almost struck in the only poem strong enough to float a recent volume of verse,—
"Ave Imperatrix."³

Ruskin, of whom Oscar Wilde claimed to be a disciple, was

¹E. C. Stedman, "Nature and Elements of Poetry," Century, XXII (June, 1892), 185.

²(New York: Crowell, 1884), p. xvi.

³Century, II (August, 1882), 464-65.

greatly admired, but there is nothing in either magazine reviews or publishers' statistics to show that he was widely read. He was occasionally quoted to refute the aesthetes,¹ but he was too thoroughly British to appeal greatly to Americans.

John Addington Symonds' Studies of the Greek Poets and The Renaissance in Italy were too learned to be the subject for much factual criticism. The Atlantic considered them scholarly, but thought that too much importance had been attached to Italian literature: "The Renaissance was not conveyed to Europe by the literature of its corruption."² Miss Gilder, ardent as usual in her dislikes, thought The Renaissance in Italy ". . . a large-sized primer made voluminous in appearance by the magnificent type and heavy paper with which the publishers clothed it,"³ but she advanced nothing more specific. Symonds' style, however, came in for general disapproval, as did also his tendency toward impressionistic criticism.⁴ The Nation called The Renaissance in Italy immoral.

. . . imitating and following Taine's ideas and practices, he has dragged to light all the low, deservedly forgotten writings of the Renaissance in Italy, provided they expressed sentiment of some sort—good, bad, indifferent, crazy, selfish, and above all licentious—and displayed them for the admiration of refined modern readers.

His discrimination is faulty, and the proclivity to what is indelicate absolutely reprehensible.⁵

Symonds' poems, New and Old: A Volume of Verse, received little notice except in the Nation, and then with a statement that "of course Mr. Symonds would have claimed less of our space if his verses were not a type of what the systematic development of the poetry of passion has resulted in."⁶

William Hurrell Mallock, who contributed his share of

¹Warner quoted him triumphantly: "Art, in short, is created by pleasure, not for pleasure" (Harper's, LXXXVII [August, 1893], 477).

²Atlantic, LI (May, 1883), 669-703.

³Critic, II (January, 1882), 21.

⁴See Atlantic, XLV (May, 1880), 706-07; LXVI (November, 1890), 712; and LXXIV (August, 1894), 275.

⁵Nation, XXXV (December 28, 1882), 556-57.

⁶Ibid., XXX (October 28, 1880), 312.

satire of aestheticism by way of The New Republic, but who was instrumental in preparing the way for decadence by his attack on the scientific "postivist school" of philosophy and his advocacy of the Roman Catholic Church, was liked as little as he was known in America. The Harper's reviewer objected to the Catholic point of view in Is Life Worth Living?¹ The question asked in the title was not one which occurred to Americans in the late seventies. The Atlantic tended to identify Mallock with the thing satirized in The New Republic:

That it was a malicious picture was evident enough; that it was the picture of a would-be moralist seemed equally clear; but the dispassionate reader could hardly rid himself of the impression that the new censor appreciated with a zest somewhat too keen, for a reformer, the fascination of certain disguised immoralities at which he perpetually and rather broadly hinted.²

The theme of A Romance of the Nineteenth Century, the necessity for God and for a dogmatic religion, was a generally unpopular one. Scribner's declared that the small amount of good in the novel could not balance its "lack of art. its incongruity, and its occasional grossness." The most disagreeable peculiarity of Mallock's was "his apparent inability to imagine a woman who shall be entirely free from impure suggestion, if not in herself at least in her speech."³ The book was a "thoroughly fraudulent literary performance," according to the Nation, which could not determine whether Mallock had written a moral tractate, a satire, or merely a degenerate novel.

The truth is that Mr. Mallock has made in this work perfectly clear what many people, doubtless, have all along suspected—the fact that he is not to be regarded as a really serious person. He is familiar with utilitarian terminology, and particularly sharp at discerning the weak points of a purely intellectual credo that claims universality, but he has never offered aught but what Carlyle termed the sprinkling of moonshine as a substitute . . . a thoroughly disagreeable, not to say nasty book.⁴

Social Equality was "a juggle with words," "a monstrous mare's nest."⁵

¹Harper's, LX (December, 1879), 149-150.

²"The Later Writings of Mr. Mallock," Atlantic, XLVI (December, 1880), 767.

³Scribner's, XXII (September, 1881), 796.

⁴Nation, XXXIII (July 28, 1881), 79.

⁵Ibid., XXXV (September 21, 1882), 247.

The chief, and in most cases the only, source of information concerning the new London group was Punch, containing Du Maurier's drawings labeled "Nincompoopiana." Since the Franco-Prussian War and the subsequent exhibitions of radicalism in France, American polite culture had looked to London for its models rather than to Paris. Punch, therefore, was widely read, especially in fashionable circles, and the aesthetic poet, "Postlethwaite," was a familiar figure.¹ This introduction of aestheticism to the American people was favorable rather than otherwise for the appearance of Wilde's Poems² in 1881. They were so much better than Du Maurier had led Americans to believe they could possibly be that critics almost unanimously expressed an agreeable surprise. As artistic productions they were not great, but it was amazing that they could be even good.

The Century explained "to those who have not been kept informed" that Oscar Wilde was no other than "Postlethwaite," but hoped that the damage done by Du Maurier's attacks had been only temporary, for Wilde had turned out to be "after all a poet of no mean calibre." But there was something "lackadaisical" and even "carnal" about his work, for the young poet seemed to have the same feeling toward the commercial atmosphere of English life as Keats had.

. . . . Mr. Wilde is wiser and better-hearted than he paints himself. His very bitterness shows how keenly he feels his nationality. And it is in these poems that the healthy and promising sign lurks which ought to tell his satirists that the stuff of a true poet is in him. . . . [His] affectations seem chiefly imitative. He has followed Swinburne too closely. He has been hurt by the prestige of Rossetti, another poet who is every crying "Odi profanum!" in mournful imitation of the feeling in British society. . . .³ "Ave Imperatrix" outweighs a hundred cartoons of "Punch."³

The reviewer commented favorably on the fact that, though Wilde made some gestures toward Roman Catholicism, he seemed to come back unsatisfied.⁴ Harper's disliked what Wilde had to say concerning

¹George William Curtis spoke of Wilde as ". . . . a young gentlemen who won some literary distinction at Oxford, and who was obscurely known as a kind of leader in certain extravagances of costume and conduct which have been satirized in Punch. . . . (Harper's, LXIV [April, 1882], 790).

²The American edition was by Robert Brothers, Boston.

³Century, I (November, 1881), 152-53. T. B. Aldrich wrote to Stedman: "Whether or not the poor devil ever stands there again, he stood on the heights when he wrote Ave Imperatrix" (Life and Letters of Edmund Clarence Stedman, II, 203).

⁴Century, loc. cit.

human passions, but was pleased with his treatment of birds and flowers:

Shining through much rank undergrowth of fustian and stubble of verbosity, there are gleams of true poesy in Mr. Oscar Wilde's Poems, frequent and brilliant enough to afford some intimations of the better work he might accomplish if he would liberate himself from the shackles he has imposed upon himself by his persistent imitation of imperfect models, and his no less persistent pursuit of carnal and often unclean ideals. With a singular perversity, Mr. Wilde not only imitates imperfect models, but copies and exaggerates their defects. As "fleshly" and as vain and self-conceited as they, he is coarser in his moods than either, nor does he veil his coarseness with the subtle ideality which is their redeeming grace, and his self-conceit often takes a querulous and lugubrious form which is in strong contrast with their arrogant, but always robust and manly self-sufficiency. His style also is often tumid and redundant. Barring these serious defects, it is pleasant to be able to say that few of our contemporaneous minor poets describe as felicitously as he the haunts and ways and songs of birds, and the characteristic beauties and relations of flowers, or trace as subtly the influence they exert on man, and the part they bear in the sweet harmonies of nature. The sense of the beautiful is very strong in Mr. Wilde.¹

The Atlantic and the Critic objected to the lines,

"To drift with every passion till my soul
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play. . . ."

There was too much of the "fleshly," and the passion was often forced. The poet was too free in giving rein to his emotions, particularly those concerned with the body. "He luxuriates in images of nudity; his word for lover is 'wanton,' and for chastity 'unravished'; and in his longest poem, 'Charmides,' a narrative, he carefully and completely disrobes Pallas." Yet there were "trenchant and genuine utterances," for the book was really a remarkable product for a young man of twenty-five. It was to be hoped that he could outgrow his admiration for Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, and Keats.² But Miss Gilder could see no merit in the book whatever:

There is no sign that a new poet has arisen. There is no verse in it which does not readily recall the devices of some modern master of poetry. For never in recent times has a book of so much and such carefully studied foppery been given to the public. The lackadaisical airs

¹Harper's, LXIII (October, 1881), 793.

²Atlantic, XLIX (January, 1882), 122.

and languid graces, the sighings and posturings and gestures of despair--these and all the characteristics of the new school appear in three-fourths of Mr. Wilde's poems.¹

The Nation evinced surprise that the original of "Postlethwaite" could produce "very fair poetry," and concluded that "the literalness of Punch's caricatures has been . . . overestimated." But in spite of his merits, Wilde was a "lyric parrot" of Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, and even Tennyson, and "one is never sure that the parrot perceives the precise bearings of his utterances, and the preponderance of the purely oral in them is an undeniable drawback to the permanence of one's enjoyment in them." While Wilde lacked the puerility of "the more abject poets who follow the Swinburne-Rossetti gonfalon--Mr. George Barlow, for instance, and others of the 'utter' school," nevertheless his "metrical tact" and "perceptiveness and appreciation" was entirely different from having a natural voice of his own.²

In Chicago, the Dial's review was obviously intended to introduce Wilde to readers who had never heard of him before. The writer quoted extensively from the novel, Mrs. Geoffrey,³ to show what aestheticism was, and showed an acquaintance with Du Maurier's cartoons, saying that Wilde was "best known to notoriety if not to fame."

That a man could go about the streets wearing long hair and unheard of garments and bearing lilies in his hands, and give afternoon tea-parties and astonish his guests with the fantastic novelty of his apartments and the etherial nonsense of his conversation, all as a carefully-studied preliminary to the publication of a volume of poems, would seem at first thought surprising. But the surprise lessens when we recall the early history of Bulwer and Disraeli . . . and the possibility that this young man from Dublin . . . may have chosen to attempt his march to fame by the Disraelian route . . . affected and strained though they [the poems] often are, and lacking the exaltation that can come alone from a high and sincere poetic purpose, they are scarcely what one would expect from a hair-brain or a guy. Coming from a new and unknown writer, they are certainly remarkable. Striking in form and treatment, and polished in workmanship, while they fail to move those deeper human chords, inaccessible to their studied artificiality, they often surprise us with their virility and freedom, and are never, except in disconnected

¹Critic, I (July 30, 1881), 201.

²Nation, XXXIII (April 4, 1881), 100-101.

³See page 25 of this work.

passages, ridiculous . . . if we are to have more of this Aesthete's philosophy it is desirable by all means to have it in the form of poetry.¹

Wilde's unfortunate performance in regard to the publication of Rennell Rodd's Rose Leaf and Apple Leaf brought down a heavy outpouring of criticism. The Dial said that ". . . he so postures and poses as the would-be leader of the English 'jeunes guerriers du drapeau romantique,' that all that is left to the poet whose work he is commending is to wish for some cave in which to hide his belittled head,"² and the Nation believed that Rodd's poems were seriously handicapped by the fact that Wilde had edited them.³

The Aesthetic Movement, written by William Hamilton soon after Wilde's return to England, was reviewed in only one periodical, the Dial, in which a reviewer wrote, "This much ridiculed movement is really exercising an extended and wholesome influence. . . . Those who ridicule and resist the movement, and those who are indifferent to or are ignorant of it, share its benefits. . . ." The writer indicated that he had just learned for the first time Wilde's full name. He believed that Americans ought to feel somewhat ashamed for the way they had treated the aesthete, but that they were not wholly to blame. They had been badly misinformed by the press. He quoted Hamilton's gibes at America, and said, "Americans would not mind the slur, but it would have been more dignified in Mr. Hamilton to omit it."

After reading of the antecedents of Mr. Wilde, of his own excellent record in scholarship at Trinity College, Dublin, and at Oxford, and of the sincerity of his efforts to spread abroad a right understanding of the use and value of beauty in proper forms and places, the opinion of his work and character undergoes a change. It was inevitable that Mr. Wilde should be satirically treated in America. The public could not know how to receive him—whether as a charlatan or as an earnest and well-meaning but eccentric enthusiast. It chose to avoid the risk of making itself ridiculous, by taking him for a charlatan.⁴

During the years between 1883 and 1891 (the interim between

¹Dial, I (April, 1881), 82-85.

²Ibid., III (October 7, 1882), 265.

³Nation, XXXV (November 30, 1882), 469.

⁴Dial, IV (October, 1883), 135.

aestheticism and decadence) Wilde's books received little notice. The Happy Prince and Other Tales was reviewed briefly and favorably as a children's book.¹ Even The Picture of Dorian Gray, which which was first published in Lippincott's,² received scant attention, and that moderately favorable.³ Aestheticism, so far as most Americans were concerned, was dead, and its leader a forgotten man. Julian Hawthorne reviewed Dorian Gray for the periodical which published it as follows:

It is a salutary departure from the ordinary English novel. . . . Mr. Wilde, as we all know, is a gentleman of an original and audacious turn of mind, and the commonplace is scarcely possible to him. Besides, his advocacy of novel ideas in art, life, dress, and demeanor has led us to expect surprising things of him . . . not many will deny that the book is a remarkable one and would attract attention even had it appeared without the author's name on the title-page . . . some of his clever sayings are more than clever,—they show real insight and a comprehensive grasp. Their wit is generally cynical; but they are put into the mouth of one of the characters, Lord Harry, and Mr. Wilde himself refrains from definitely committing himself to them; though one cannot help suspecting that Mr. Wilde regards Lord Harry as being an uncommonly able fellow.⁴

A consciousness of a new emphasis on form and style in literature was present, however, in the literary notes of the magazines, and was occasionally, as in the following quotation from Scribner's, denounced as unnatural and un-American.

¹Dial, IX (December, 1888), 211.

²XLVI (July, 1890), 3-149. In 1909 the original MS. of Dorian Gray, as published in Lippincott's, was sold in New York at auction for \$1,000.00 (Stuart Mason, Bibliography of Oscar Wilde [London: T. Werner Laurie, Ltd., 1914], 352-53).

³Wilde wrote to Menley in somewhat exaggerated terms, ". . . the ethical import of 'Dorian Gray' has been . . . strongly recognized by the foremost Christian papers of England and America. . . ." (Stuart Mason, Art and Morality [London: Frank Palmer, 1908], 98).

When published in book form by Ward, Lock and Company, London, New York, and Melbourne, Dorian Gray contained six new chapters, many alterations, and much additional material. The first authorized reprint in America was in 1910 by John W. Luce and Company, Boston. There were, however, several unauthorized reprints, one dated only two days after the publication of Lippincott's for July, 1890, from which the text was taken. See Mason, Art and Morality, pp. 286-303.

⁴"Romance of the Impossible," Lippincott's, XLVI (September, 1890), 460-61.

We have what may legitimately be denominated dandyism in literature. . . . There are many writers, we fear, who care more about their manner of saying a thing than about the thing they have to say. All these devotees to style, all these coiners of fine phrases who tax their ingenuity to make their mode of saying a thing more remarkable than the thing said—men who play with words for the sake of the words, and who seek admiration for their cleverness in handling the medium of thought itself, and men also who perform literary gymnastics in order to attract attention—all these are literary dandies. The great verities and vitalities of thought and life are never supreme with these men. . . . Verily they have their reward, for they have their admirers, though they are among those no more in earnest than themselves.

We have had in America one eminent literary dandy [Poe?]. . . . He was as notorious as he sought to be. People read his clever verses and clapped their hands, but those verses did not voice any man's or woman's aspiration, or sooth any man's or woman's sorrows. They helped nobody. They were not the earnest outpourings of a nature consecrated either to God or to song. . . . We would not speak of this man were we not conscious that we have—now living and writing—others who are like him in spirit and in aim. . . .¹

Intentions, of which only eleven hundred copies were issued in the American editions of 1891 and 1894,² was ignored by most periodicals,³ as was also Lord Arthur Saville's Crime.⁴ The Nation was the only standard journal which gave Intentions a full-length review. The writer was obviously extraordinarily intrigued by the book, but felt that a degree of caution was necessary in presenting his opinions to the public.

When he affirms that it is more true that Life and Nature imitate Art than that Art imitates Life and Nature, that

¹Scribner's, XX (September, 1880), 788.

²Mason, Bibliography of Oscar Wilde, p. 359.

³A very favorable review is quoted in Mason, ibid., p. 359, from the Photographic American Review (July, 1891), a periodical which the writer has been unable to locate: "We owe more to Oscar Wilde than any laudation can ever repay. We have reaped a harvest from his sowing that he will never be sufficiently allowed to share. He is one of the cleverest men who ever touched our shores, and his words have had an influence which has been felt on the plains of the west, in the woodman's cabin in Maine, and in the artistic life given to almost every trade and manufacture upon which his new presentation of artistic creed could touch. We have not, as a nation, come to a recognition of the value of this man to us."

⁴Only five hundred copies were issued in America (Stuart Mason, op. cit., p. 362).

Art in no case reproduces its age, that the telling of beautiful untrue things is the proper aim of Art--which are his main propositions--he comes dangerously near implying, in the reader's mind, that the said reader is a fool. Though for our own part we most potently believe these things, we hold that it is not meet to have it so set down.

The reviewer quoted the summary at the end of "The Decay of Lying" and continued:

Without subscribing to this creed unreservedly, we shall yet venture to confess that, so far as criticism is concerned, Mr. Wilde seems to us to have the truth of the matter, and to have carried the analysis of the art and its ideals further in certain definite ways than we have yet seen in any other such paper. . . . It would be easy to pick up phrases and sentences here and there and make them ridiculous, but this ridiculous effect is just the one that will appear to the commonplace mind without any effort on the part of anybody. It is rather our intention and pleasure to intimate that the reader will do a wise thing who tries to be more just to Mr. Wilde's thought than he has been able to be, and so arrive at the substantial truth of which his essays contain more, both expressed and suggested, than is commonly to be met with nowadays. The defect of the volume is its cleverness and its yielding to a certain piquancy of style. . . . At the end we almost relent--cleverness is so entertaining, and wisdom in the Aristotelian form can be had elsewhere; it is only in the interest of the too serious reader that we put in our caveat, and for his sake give warning that the most incredible paradox may be only an unusual and most interesting crystallization of truth.¹

Salomé, coming at the height of the decadence, and having achieved notoriety by having been refused a license for production by the Lord Chamberlain on the ground that the play introduced Biblical characters, was more widely discussed. The anonymous writer of "Notes" for the Chap-book (Bliss Carmen?) thought he could see a similarity between Salomé and Adah Isaac Menken's Judith, and added, "It would be unkind to call Oscar's work an imitation; let one say rather that Adah Isaac Menken's was an anticipation."² Edward Everett Hale, Jr., wrote that "it was Oscar Wilde all over."

Such an extraordinary conjunction of affectation [Wilde and Beardsley] is ominous. But, strangely enough, there are some things in "Salomé" that are good. It is impossible to read it without feeling curiously moved and stirred. The careless talk of the loungers on the terrace . . . is

¹Nation, LIII (January 9, 1891), 34-35.

²Chap-book, II (February 1, 1895), 261.

good. . . . The play may well have been very effective on the stage, for there is a constant feeling of movement, of life, and it is considerably worth reading now that it is published. . . . With all this, however, the play is wholly ephemeral. Its action is trivial and its dialogue affected. Its ideas, and its language, too, are extravagances.¹

The Bookman took the occasion to quote the alleged mot of Whistler: "Wilde? Oh, he is le bourgeois malgré lui!"² Richard Burton classed Wilde with Sudermann, Hauptmann, and Pinero as one of the modern dramatists influenced by Ibsen,³ which was enough to damn any writer so far as the majority of Americans were concerned. The Critic was content to reprint the portions of Max Nordau's Degeneration which dealt with Wilde.⁴

An Ideal Husband drew forth two censorious remarks from the Critic, but otherwise was practically unnoticed: "If the lines I have seen quoted are samples of Mr. Wilde's wit, his brain needs refreshing. . . . It seems to me that a very little of this sort of writing is a good deal too much";⁵ and the climax "is spoiled by a violent and clumsy expedient, and the concluding act tapers off into insignificance."⁶

Not a word concerning Wilde's trial was published in the principal American magazines. Even though theologians and pedagogues were citing him as a horrible example, his name was banned from the periodicals.⁷ Elbert Hubbard spoke of him as "a late

¹Dial, XVII (July 1, 1894), 12.

²I (February, 1895), 9.

³"Maurice Maeterlinck," Atlantic, LXXIV (November, 1894), 672.

⁴Critic, XXVI (April 20, 1895), 296-97.

⁵Ibid. (January 26, 1895), 68.

⁶Ibid. (March 16, 1895), 211.

⁷Newspapers, however, while not printing the details of the charge against Wilde or the trial, did not hesitate to comment. See the excerpts from American newspapers in Public Opinion, XVIII (April 11, 1895), 374-75: "Time was ripe to chastise such a literary debauchee" (New York Recorder). "The fall of Oscar Wilde has put before the sight of all men the end, fate, and fruit of 'art for art's sake.' When right is shut out of the aims and acts of men, men rot. There is no way to dodge this. It is as sure as fate. All the world knows it, but part of the world now and then seeks some by-path on the plea that 'art for art's sake' gives a field in which beauty takes the place of right and men are

Critic, who now wears prison garb and is doing the first honest work that ever his hands found to do."¹ The Ballad of Reading Gaol, in 1899, was given scant attention. Miss Gilder's criticism speaks for the general attitude: "Nor would we question the poetic craftsmanship which everywhere characterized the Ballad of Reading Gaol. Our objection should rather be based upon the unavoidable fact that the poem is a congeries of morbid descriptions, whose only wholesome purpose could possibly be to warn of "the iron gin that waits for Sin."²

Whistler and Beardsley were well known in America as artists, but almost not at all as literary men. Whistler's reputation as a painter increased steadily in America during the nineties. In 1892 the London art critic for the Nation, signing himself "N.N.," declared that "Ruskin's teachings are obsolete, save in the provinces; Whistler's power has grown with the years. . . . Whistler was a quarter of a century ahead of his contemporaries," and bewailed the fact that Whistler was not called upon to decorate public buildings in America.³ Whistler's best friends in America, who sometimes exalted him as "the greatest selective genius among living painters,"⁴ were among the art critics who were responsible for the revived interest in interior decoration.

The Gentle Art of Making Enemies was noted by the Atlantic as "an exhibition of the implements of modern warfare."⁵

to be judged not as good men or bad but as 'artists,' and the 'artistic instinct' is used as veil and excuse for all that offends morals or outrages propriety" (Philadelphia Press). "Wilde's present predicament gives strong corroboration to the keen estimate placed upon him by the German student of degeneracy [Nordau]" (Chicago-Times-Herald).

¹As It Seems to Me (East Aurora, New York: Roycroft Shop, 1898), p. 51.

²Critic, XXXIV (June, 1899), 562. Harry Thurston Peck remarked, "Oscar Wilde has written a new French play called Pharaon, and a poem of a hundred stanzas dealing with a painful experience" (Bookman, VI [December, 1897], 271).

³Nation, LIV (April 14, 1892), 280-81.

⁴Royal Cortiszez, "Egotism in Contemporary Art," Atlantic, LXXIII (May, 1894), 648.

⁵LXV (November, 1890), 714.

The Nation was the only periodical which reviewed it at length, but was plainly mystified:

We have tried to treat these opinions seriously, but, after all, are they the serious opinions of an artist upon art? Or are they only a part of that ingenious self-advertisement of which Mr. Whistler is past-master, intended not to instruct, but to attract attention? One has an uneasy suspicion that to take him in earnest is "to consider him too curiously," and that perhaps the best answer to him would be, "Blagueur, va!"¹

Beardsley was the center of so much dispute that a more extended discussion of attitudes toward him is valuable, although he was not a literary figure. After leaving the insurance office in 1893, his first important assignment² was the decoration of a new edition by J. M. Dent of the Morte d'Arthur. These drawings were universally popular, not only in England, but in America. In March, 1894, the Atlantic³ mentioned them with praise, and in September³ declared enthusiastically,

There is much in this book which seems to give us the very essence of illustration. . . . [The illustrations] are superb, full of freshness and originality in treatment, with a decorative feeling that might almost be called intense, if intensity, in connection with English work, did not carry with it a suspicion of impressive awkwardness. . . . Mr. Beardsley . . . is nothing if not full of grace, sweetness, and charm. When he tries to be grand and passionate, as in some of his larger pictures, he is apt to fail utterly; he is not himself; he clothes spurious passion in the conventional garb of the modern English preraphaelite tradition, which does not suit him. . . . Yet he is a personality and an artist full of surprises . . . in his way, a master, with limitations, in the use of black and white. The limitations we should take to be those of his personality, which is idyllic and poetic, not grand or fierce.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Salomé drawings came as a considerable shock to many who had praised the Morte d'Arthur. Edward Everett Hale, Jr., announced that Beardsley was "more affected than Wilde himself."

What one is first inclined to criticize in Mr. Beardsley is his lack of originality. His pictures remind us of almost every phase of art that has ever existed; or, at any rate, of every phase which had ever a tinge of the grotesque or the trivial in its character. From the bald priestly pictures mingled among the Egyptian hieroglyphics, down to the graceful frivolities of Willette of the "Red Windmill," Mr. Beardsley seems to have laid everything under contribu-

¹Nation, LI (August 7, 1890), 116.

²LXXIII, 424.

³LXXIV, 413-14.

tion.¹

The Nation cried out, "They are caricatures, which have no excuse for being while men are men and women are women." They were "fraudulent, impudent, and worthless" and, being such, found a fitting place in the Yellow Book, which was "an insult to the intelligence of the nineteenth century."²

The Bookman, however, consistently befriended Beardsley. When the artist's health was delaying the proposed trip to America with John Lane, Peck several times indicated his solicitude and his hope that the trip would not be given up. A school-fellow of Beardsley's wrote in the Bookman, "When Mr. Beardsley reaches these shores, I feel confident that he will make a pleasant impression, for apart from the genius which he undoubtedly has, without regard to its character, he is one of the most delightful companions. . . . He is widely read and is a most entertaining and versatile talker, is an excellent linguist, and revels in French and Italian poetry."³ The Atlantic grudgingly admitted, "We may accept Beardsley, but Heaven preserve us from Beardsleyites."⁴ Jeanette Gilder, on the contrary, was horrified:

Aubrey Beardsley threatens us. That is what we get for having so persistently denounced the young man's eccentricities. He announces that he is coming to America, and may be here next month! He is going to lecture, and "Italian Art" and "Ugliness" will be his two subjects. On one of them, at least, he is thoroughly qualified to speak.⁵

I think that Aubrey Beardsley will have a surprise when he comes to this country. He probably thinks that his drawings will be a revelation to us, and that we are going to be tremendously impressed by them. His surprise will come when he finds that every man who wields a pencil can do the same thing, some better, some—but no, none could do worse,—and that our hoardings are as gay with flattened-out ladies in impossible positions as are those of London and Paris.⁶

¹Dial, XVII (July 1, 1894), 13.

²Nation, LIX (July 8, 1894), 162.

³G. F. Scotson-Clark, "The Artist of 'The Yellow Book,'" Bookman, I (April, 1895), 160-61.

⁴LXXV (March, 1895), 420.

⁵Critic, XXVI (March 9, 1895), 182.

⁶Ibid. (March 23, 1895), 221.

Beardsley's health was so precarious, however, that he and Lane gave up their American plans. Peck was disappointed, and a writer in his periodical attempted to rescue the artist's reputation from the abyss into which it had fallen because of his association with the Yellow Book. He insisted that Aubrey Beardsley was "an artist entirely misunderstood," and that his Yellow Book drawings were in his worst style. His reputation, which, according to the writer, should be based on the Morte d'Arthur, had been further damaged by the extent to which he had been imitated by Western artists.¹

The drawings for The Rape of the Lock were liked, even by Miss Gilder, whose opinion took a curious turn: "The . . . designs . . . are pretty . . . spite of the opportunities offered by big-wigs, high heels, and embroidered shirts, are scarcely even grotesque."² When Peck showed amusement at her change of heart, she replied, "There is no doubt about Mr. Beardsley's cleverness. I never for a moment denied it. I only regretted that it had been so misguided."³ The editor of the Dial wondered what "will be the case a hundred years from now. Will Aubrey Beardsley continue to support Pope, or—?"⁴ But Beardsley's reputation continued to have defenders.⁵ Even in 1899, a Critic

¹Louis J. Rhead, "The Moral Aspects of the Artistic Poster," Bookman, I (June, 1895), 313-14.

²Critic, XXIX (July 18, 1896), 44.

³Ibid. (August 15, 1896), 105. One wonders if the short article about Miss Gilder, with the accompanying picture, which Peck published in the Bookman, XXI (September, 1896), pp. 16-17, was not prompted by impish humor. The article says that she had never worn evening dress in her life. The photograph shows her in mannish costume, with jacket, striped shirt-waist, bow tie, and a large purse and bunch of keys hanging from her belt.

⁴Dial, XXI (August 1, 1896), 72.

⁵As a matter of fact, the "poster rage" clinched his popularity. The substitution of the lithographer's stone for the wood block had been made about 1882 by the Strobbridge Company of Cincinnati. Credit was probably due to Matt Morgan, an English draftsman who came to America to caricature Grant in Frank Leslie's Magazine (Brander Matthews, "The Pictorial Poster," Century, XXII [September, 1892], 748-56). The new technique was applied particularly to the production of posters advertising plays, books, and periodicals. Among the best known were the Chap-book posters, which were artistic and fantastic, and became very popular on their own account. Prospective buyers often competed in bidding for them without buying the periodical they

writer was defending him:

Except Mr. Whistler, no artist of his time has made more of a sensation, and I might add more of an impression. There is much of Beardsley's work that is detestable, but there is more that is admirable. . . . it must be conceded that few artists have had such an extraordinarily deep penetration into the hidden abysses of sin, and such a lurid power of suggesting them. It would have been better for his reputation if he had not; but he chose to belong to a modern school of cynicism, and to depict life mostly in its more animal or brutish aspects: and that again is his own affair. It is the artist as he is that one must reckon with, not the artist we could have made him; and to condemn a man for adopting different ideas and a different standard from one's own is as absurd as condemning him for wearing different clothes.

. . . . It was really a lack of reverence that was at the bottom of Beardsley's taste in subjects. He could draw beautiful subjects as beautifully as any one.¹

Beardsley's literary efforts, like Whistler's, were little known and less liked. The Chap-book alone made any mention of them: "Of his writings, it is hardly necessary to speak. He was ambitious to become known as an author and he wrote stories, verses, and verse translations. None of them could be looked upon as more than evidences of a pretty versatility."² Under the Hill was

advertised. This situation called forth some stanzas from Carolyn Wells, a young woman who was contributing to the "dinky" magazines:

"Do Posters Post?

"Do posters post? although they sprawl
In loud profusion at each stall;
Gibson's pretentious black-and-whites,
Nankivell's freaks and Beardsley's frights
And Rhead's red maidens, lean and tall.
Although we know each artist's scrawl
The book they note we can't recall.
And though their wild effect delights,
Do posters post?

"Their lines and forms our eyes enthrall.
Their color schemes our tastes appall;
The keen collector glibly cites
Beardsley and all his satellites,
They're works of art, but after all,
Do posters post?" (Philistine, II [Feb., 1896], 90).

The Beardsley influence was strong in these drawings, and did much to teach commercial artists the use of line and plain surfaces.

¹Critic, XXXIV (May, 1899), 439-43.

²Chap-book, VIII (April, 1898), 391.

never mentioned; it was as unknown (or unspoken of) as Wilde's The Harlot's House. However, through his drawings he was perhaps the most familiar symbol to Americans of the impudent revolt and decadence of the nineties.

Andrew Lang was generally respected as a critic and was an occasional contributor to American periodicals of articles on contemporary British writers. But his mild and scholarly emphasis on form and style,¹ particularly in poetry, brought him unfriendly reviews, such as the following from the Century:

Beginning under the Rossetti influence, the poet has kept remarkably clear of mannerism, and his work now shows no unpleasant trace of the school, if it ever did. The fault that may be found with him is a fault of the day, of nearly all modern art,—namely, literary self-consciousness,—ending in a verse that at times ceases to move on account of its faulty faultlessness.²

The Nation remarked that "The high-water mark of second-class London poetry is attained, doubtless, when we have a new volume by Andrew Lang."³

William Ernest Henley, because of his championing of impressionism, was likely to be associated with decadence by Americans of the nineties. The prevailing feeling toward him was also of disapprobation. He was too violent, too eccentric, and too likely to be pessimistic.⁴ Elbert Hubbard was one of the very few who read him with pleasure,⁵ during the early part of the decade. The early poems were not reviewed by anyone beyond a passing note. Song of the Sword, and Other Poems, however,

¹By no means decadent, however. See Lang, "Decadence," Critic (August, 1900), 171-72: "What is a 'decadent' in the literary sense of the word? I am apt to believe that he is an unwholesome young person, who has read about 'ages of decadence' in histories of literature, likes what he is told about them, and tries to die down to it, with more or less success. . . ."

"By kicking holes in his boots, crushing in his hat, and avoiding soap, any young man may achieve a comfortable degree of sordidness, and then, if his verses are immaterial, and his life suicidal, he may regard himself as a decadent indeed."

²Century, IV (October, 1883), 955.

³Nation, XLVIII (May 9, 1889), 389.

⁴The Nation reviewer liked A Book of Verses better than Swinburne's "wide-mouthed lines," and thought that, while the author chose repellant themes, there was "no coarse French taste for merely physical horrors" (XLIX [December 26, 1889], 522).

⁵Philistine, V (July, 1897), 56.

elicited some attention, chiefly unfavorable:

The author of "The Song of the Sword" has a vocabulary of big words which he uses in so conveniently vague a sense that doubtless some one will presently discover him to be the greatest poet of the age. Most of his mouthings seem to us sound and fury. . . . [Henley should] cease doing violence to style for the sake of originality and consent to the formal restraints within which much greater poets do not chaff.¹

It may or not be the direct influence of George Meredith, but some of the younger English writers show marked traces of his sway. This is especially true of W. E. Henle', whose "Song of the Sword, and Other Verses" (Scribner's) affords a distinct disappointment. The slightest disposition to introduce feminine attributes into manly character seems to drive him frantic. Mr. Henley's whole philosophy on this point seems rather like that of a discontented monk than of a thoroughly manly person.²

A few years later the Bookman sided with Henley, once with a favorable review of his Poems,³ and again in regard to his critical work:

The theory which is known as "Art for Art's Sake" has long been preached to deaf ears, but the ears are opening, and in whatever regard it is held by lay minds, there seems little doubt but it will inspire and persuade the artists of the future. The great service which we owe to Mr. Henley is his long and faithful adherence to this creed. He has consistently fought and suffered for it. He has spread the propaganda through every available channel, has trumpeted defiance at his opponents, and has been, of a truth, the veritable protagonist of this cause.⁴

American critics disapproved of Grant Allen on three scores. In the first place, his New Hedonism was an exposition of the philosophy of pleasure, but was even more a tract for socialistic utilitarianism.⁵ In the second place, The Woman Who Did, a realistic novel on the problem of marriage, was execrated throughout this country, almost as much as in England,⁶ as a subversive

¹Dial, XIII (September 6, 1892), 187.

²Nation, LV (July 7, 1892), 11.

³VII (May, 1898), 247-48.

⁴H. B. Marriott Watson, "William Ernest Henley," Bookman, II (November, 1895), 187.

⁵Jackson, op. cit., p. 29.

⁶See Wells, Experiment in Autobiography, 461-67.

social influence. Finally, in The Color Sense he attempted to establish a relationship between the perception of each color and some human necessity; and in Physiological Aesthetics he developed Spencer's chapter on aestho-physiology into a series of essays on the meaning of pleasure and pain. These more or less unscientific attempts were interpreted as evidences of a decadent interest in sensation. Allen's association with the Yellow Book group confirmed the opinion. The Critic voiced in plainer language than the other journals a deep-seated disapproval:

Mr. Allen unfortunately is not the only person in England who is trying to pervert the young. He has disciples, and his doctrines are aired from one end of the country to the other. . . .¹

I should like to see a bonfire made up of the "women who," the Lord Ormonts and their Amintas, the Judes and their Arabelles and Sues—kindled with the Yellow Asters and Yellow Books and other combustible stuff. Perhaps it might be well to give the Heavenly Twins a roasting at this fire, and to throw in some of Hamlin Garland's recent work.²

John Davidson received a measure of appreciation in America which was not granted to any of the other younger English poets of the nineties aside from Dobson and Kipling. Essentially an independent personality, he was only circumstantially attached to the Bodley Head group.³ He was decadent in his somewhat morbid separation from the contemporary age and in his assertion of a pessimistic kind of individualism,⁴ but his earlier work, particularly his poetry, was free from eccentricities of style and characterized frequently by a charming whimsicality. Jane T. Stoddart interviewed him for the Bookman, remarking that "until lately, he was the idolised poet of a small and select coterie; now . . . he has become one of the most popular and fashionable of our younger poets."⁵ The Atlantic was suspicious of his association with John Lane's group, but in 1894 was tolerant and even hopeful of the "neo-Elizabethans":

¹XXVII (November 30, 1895), 371.

²Ibid., XXVIII (January 4, 1896), 12.

³Jackson, op. cit., p. 186.

⁴Ibid., p. 183.

⁵Bookman, I (March, 1895), 87.

In his plays he is one of the Neo-Elizabethans who, with the help of Mr. Beadsley, are adorning the last days of the Victorian era. He is equipped with a wealth of imagination and fancy which would have stood in excellent stead to a minor poet earlier in the era, for such an one would have been likely to eschew the fantastic as diligently as Mr. Davidson courts it. We should bear the present dispensation with patience, however, in the hope that the new Elizabethans will do more for us than they yet have shown the possibility of doing, and give us a new Shakespeare.¹

Davidson's poems appeared regularly in the Chap-book, for which Louis Chandler Moulton reviewed Ballads and Songs enthusiastically. "The Ballad of a Nun" was thought his crowning achievement, but "A Ballad of Heaven" and "A Ballad of Hell" were scarcely less striking. "The Exodus from Houndsditch" was criticized for uncouth words and phrases, but was "pregnant with thought."² The Dial was somewhat bewildered by Ballads and Songs, but was impressed; "They are novel in conception, and their imagery is as striking as any that even Mr. Kipling has conceived. We are not quite sure that we understand them, but of their curious and unexpected impressions there can be no doubt."³ Jeanette Gilder reviewed the book favorably and was especially pleased with its outspokenness and originality.⁴

As the light-hearted quality passed from Davidson's verse later in the decade, and its place was taken by an increasing tendency toward realism and moody philosophizing, his popularity waned. Characteristic of most of the critics, Miss Gilder was of the opinion that New Ballads was lacking in "passion." "Passion" with American critics usually meant a conventional acceptance of traditional sentiments, as is shown in a further examination of Miss Gilder's review: "If he had had a large share of passion, or of good taste, he would not have spoiled his impressive sermon in blank verse, 'A Woman and Her Son,' with cheap realistic effects. It is true that the greatest poets introduce such effects in their most passionate scenes--but discreetly."⁵ Fleet Street

¹Atlantic, LXXIV (August, 1894), 276.

301. ²"The Man Who Dares," Chap-book, II (February 15, 1895),

³Dial, XVIII (March 1, 1895), 151.

⁴Critic, XXVI (February 23, 1895), 141-42.

⁵Ibid., XXXI (July 3, 1897), 5.

Eclogues, first published in 1894, received no notice until reprinted two years later. The Nation was delighted with the "London flavor" of the typography and presswork, but was disappointed in the poetry with the "slipshod and whimsical handling now so common there."¹

The mid-decade group of writers, more or less tinged with decadence, who gathered around John Lane at the Bodley Head were, in almost every case, frowned upon by critics in the standard periodicals. The point of view which saw nineteenth-century society as a worn-out, withering set of institutions was, of course, contrary to American opinion in the decade contemporaneous with the disappearance of the frontier. Critics extolled a "healthy" exuberance and a "wholesome" acceptance of moral traditions. "Decadence," "symbolism,"² and the rest (there was little attempt made to distinguish between them) were perhaps to be expected in semi-feudal Europe, but could be nothing more than hot-house growths in democratic America.

Aside from his connection with the Yellow Book and the Savoy, Arthur Symons' poetry was not well known in America except by a few young imitators like Francis S. Saltus.³ The periodicals generally commented favorably on his technique, but disapproved of his subject matter. Reviews were brief. His dedication of Days and Nights to Walter Pater caught the attention of the Nation, ". . . for we judge of an author partly by his sponsor—and although he too must have his share of Helena and Faustus, and of French translations, he really puts solid and imaginative work into his pictures of life."⁴ Peck's review in the Bookman of London Nights attempted to place emphasis on Symons' literary art, but reflected a good deal of the current attitude toward poems about cabarets and street-walkers:

¹Nation, LXII (March 5, 1896), 202.

²Concerning A Net for the Wind, by Una Taylor, a reviewer wrote, "Presumably Miss Taylor is a Symbolist, and we greatly fear that her tales will be profitable neither for edification nor for entertainment save to the initiated" (Atlantic, LXXVIII [December, 1896], 848).

³See The Bayadere, and Other Sonnets (New York: Putnam's, 1894), and Honey and Gall (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1873).

⁴Nation, XLVIII (May 9, 1889), 389.

Mr. Symons may now fairly be taken as aspiring to the place of an English Beaudelaire. He cultivates sensations and deliberately exalts the sensual; and in his rather ostentatious shamelessness he recalls his Gallic model. His literary art, however, is very unusual, and his best work is worth very serious study. . . . We prefer to turn away from his music-hall experiences, his "chance romances of the streets," and the morbid subtlety of his voluptuousness, to the fine verse that gives him at his best in both subject and treatment.¹

The Chap-book, which frequently voiced a minority opinion on the side of decadence, was nothing short of savage, stating that London Nights was "a simple calendar of depravity, a record of prostitutions. Had Mr. Symons been a religious fanatic, laboring with flagellant intent, he could not more completely have debased himself. . . ." ² As an authoritative interpreter of the new movements, Symons was held in some measure of respect after the publication of "The Decadent Movement in Literature" in Harper's in 1893, an article which was perhaps more influential than anything else in calling the attention of American critics to the achievements and points of view current in London and Paris.

Concerning George Moore, only the Dial and the Bookman had anything favorable to say, and even these periodicals were fickle friends. When Impressions and Opinions reached America in 1891 it received a mildly favorable review in the Dial as an interesting curiosity.³ Vain Fortune was attacked for the "drabness of its morbid intensity" by the Atlantic, which thought that Moore had been released by Zola only to fall into the clutches of Ibsen: "Mr. Moore's style is less fickle than he who wields it, and former readers will not be shocked to read of 'the pensive and wilful sweetness of life,' 'a sort of emotive numbness,' 'the thick obsession of his dream,' and all that sort of thing." Esther Waters received general condemnation because of its subject matter. "If one wishes to see how a painstaking artist deals with disagreeable material, and keeps his readers' attention to the details of an ill-smelling world, here is the opportunity," said

¹Bookman, II (October, 1895), 149.

²Chap-book, IV (December 1, 1895), 98-99.

³XII (October, 1891), 179.

the Atlantic.¹ Harry Thurston Peck, commenting on Moore's French leanings, said that "the story of Esther Waters . . . is an evident borrowing from Germinie Lacerteux, with a greater minuteness of obstetrical description."²

It was Celibates, however, which brought the greatest storm of protest. The Dial turned its back on Moore completely and was as abusive as the Atlantic:

Indeed, it takes as ugly a word as bestial to characterize the imagination revealed in the worst scenes of this book. There is nothing edifying, or even attractive, about the sickly types of manhood and womanhood that fill Mr. Moore's gallery; they are 'degenerates' of a peculiarly disagreeable sort.³

The Atlantic believed that Celibates was "another of the books which had much better have remained unwritten. Mr. George Moore is one of those persons who imagine that ugliness is tragedy, who never shrink from the revolting, who confuse manliness with brutality, and because they have forgotten delicacy themselves, fancy that sweetness and wonder have departed from the earth. And their ghastly inventions are condoned in the sacred name of art."⁴ It was in connection with Celibates that Peck performed one of the critical handsprings which were more or less characteristic of him. In a signed article entitled "The Art of Mr. George Moore," in which he criticized Celibates as not convincing in its truthfulness, Peck wrote at some length on the moral aspects of Moore's novels, stating that he did not believe that they were immoral, and that if they were they should be judged on their literary merits.

A little less than ten years ago Mr. Moore's first great story, A Mummer's Tale, was the talk of literary London, and was sending thrills of horror down the spines of the Philistines. . . . Today he is spoken of with marked respect as a bold, original, and powerful writer whose work deserves serious study; and now his latest volume comes to us, not from the ill-starred press of Vizetelly . . . but it bears upon its title-page the cachet of highest respectability in displaying the imprint of Macmillan.

Yet Mr. Moore has not changed in any way since the time he was so bitterly denounced, and his theory of art has not

¹LXXIV (August, 1894), 279.

²Bookman, I (June, 1895), 323.

³Dial, XIX (August 16, 1895), 94.

⁴Atlantic, LXXVI (November, 1895), 707.

been changed. He is just as pessimistic as ever. His plots reek as strongly as ever of adultery and drink and despair. Why is he now a persona grata to the publishers and the libraries and the critics? The fact is, that the treatment accorded to M. Zola and to Mr. Vizetelly, and to the Moore of ten years ago and that which our novelist receives today, are not in reality symptomatic of British hypocrisy, but rather of British inconsistency—an inconsistency which comes from jumbling together two irreconcilable motives, the artistic motive and the motive of morality. . . . Now as a matter of fact, either point of view is quite defensible. It hardly admits of question that A Mummer's Tale and Mike Fletcher--yes Esther Waters and Celibates, are very far from being the sort of reading that one would recommend virginibus puerisque. The present writer does not believe their tendency to be immoral but the contrary, because they paint vice in the most ghastly colors; yet the knowledge of vice which they display is hardly edifying. On the other hand, it is quite fair to judge them wholly on their literary merits, and thus to speak of them in the very warmest terms of praise. In England, however, the motive of morality is forever clashing with the purely artistic instinct, leading in practice to the paradoxical result described above.¹

However, at nearly the same time that he was issuing this liberal dictum, Peck was capable of descending to such a vulgarity as the following:

The report comes from London on apparently good authority that Mr. George Moore is about to marry Mrs. Pearl Craigie (John Oliver Hobbes), whose divorce we lately chronicled. If this be true, it is a perfectly ideal match, and should, we assert, establish a precedent, so that hereafter men and women writers of the erotic and pessimistic school of fiction will marry one another rather than ordinary mortals who are still possessed of scruples and beliefs.²

The Critic spoke the prevailing opinion of Evelyn Innes:

Why should Mr. George Moore write novels? The question, unfortunately, is one upon which his novels throw no ray of light. . . . "Evelyn Innes" is a very long and deadly dull nightmare of a book. Not one character in it lives and breathes; not one description penetrates the mind leaving an image of the thing described. There is no action in the book and very little incident. . . . There is no perspective in the book, no selection, no light and shade, no relief. Everything is trivial and all the trivialities are treated as of equal importance. The whole effect is tiresome, un-oxygenated, and depressing in the extreme. To read the book is to spend half a day without light and air.³

In this case, the Dial returned to the rescue of the Irish novelist,

¹Bookman, I (June, 1895), 322-23.

²Ibid., II (October, 1895), 94-95.

³Critic, XXXIII (July-August, 1898), 95-97.

saying that Evelyn Innes was a "strong and penetrating portrayal of modern life," and declining to call the book immoral because the heroine happened to be.¹

The only notice taken of Hubert Crackenthorpe came after news of his death by drowning in the Seine. His body, which when found was unrecognizable, was identified by means of linen and a sleeve-link, and the drowning was attributed to suicide. The few critics who knew of his work used the details of his death as the text for sermons, like this one from the Critic:

I am not at all surprised at the tragic death of Mr. Hubert Crackenthorpe. No young man, or old one, for that matter, could write such morbid, loathsome stories as he wrote and have a sane mind. He was the most pronounced type of the decadent. According to the stories that are told of him, he was searching for material after the manner of Mr. Stephen Crane, and much the same sort of material. There is, after all, a good deal of truth in some of Nordau's theories. A man must have a diseased mind who finds pleasure in writing of diseased morals.²

The Atlantic gave Lionel Johnson one of the few American reviews of his Poems. The writer stated, "The future hardly belongs to medievalism, either in art or religion," and believed that Johnson was capable of better things than the volume indicated. However, "Laleham," "In England," "The Dark Angel," and "Cadgwith" were cited as being "not without a touch of the plangent sorrow of the world, and the valor to front it undismayed."³ The Nation, believing that the "Celtic Muse" was a healthier and purer source of literature than contemporary London, liked Johnson's work and compared it to "that fresh cadence brought by Bliss Carman from Canada. . . ."⁴

"John Oliver Hobbes" (Mrs. T. O. H. Craigie) was disliked for her Zolaesque realism, for emphasis on morbid sensations, and for her tendency to reproduce the type of the coquette fin de siècle.⁵ Her "philosophical fantasies" were read rather widely, but received no critical attention. A review of The Gods, Some Mortals, and Lord Wickenham by a Bookman writer will serve to

¹Dial, XXV (August 1, 1898), 77.

²Critic, XXX (January 2, 1897), 9.

³Atlantic, LXXVI (October, 1895), 568.

⁴Nation, LX (June 6, 1895), 449.

⁵As in A Bundle of Life, a satire on a beautiful, heartless, empty-souled, but ambitious coquette.

indicate the critical attitude toward her novels.

Surely the dreary repetition of all the sickening data of life, already too well comprehended by a sorrowing humanity, is needless, fruitless for either the uses of time or eternity. The greater need, as someone has said, is an induction in a mood which rises superior to these antinomies, bracing men for hopeful, manly work, and loving worship. True to life, vividly naturalistic this book of Mrs. Craigie's may be; but does the knowledge subserve any good purpose? The bitterness, the cynicism, the morbidness of modern life are reflected with a certain and sure¹ touch known to those who have known its baleful breath.

"The gods, if there yet be righteousness in heaven, might well resent the close association forced upon them with some of the mortals whose iniquities and weaknesses are discussed in the . . . book by John Oliver Hobbes," said the Nation.²

Max Beerbohm, because of his elegant good humor and the fact that he managed to "represent the decadence laughing, or rather smiling at itself,"³ found a half-heartedly appreciative reception among American critics. His early essay, "De Natura Barbatolorum,"⁴ was first published in the Chap-book.⁵ The little volume of Works, published in 1896, was received rather favorably by even the Critic, which periodical felt itself bound to defend him from the charge that he was not a humorist.⁶ The Atlantic quoted Beerbohm's statement, "I shall write no more. Already I feel myself to be a trifle outmoded. I belong to the Beardsley period," and said,

To express delight in such a passage, by one who tells us that in 1890 he was a freshman at Oxford, would be to confess one's self incapable of enjoying it. With discretion, too, must one read the essay of historical research upon the year 1880, and be thankful for such training as one has already received in the spirit of decadence.⁷

¹J. MacArthur in the Bookman, I (May, 1895), 257.

²LXI (July 11, 1895), 31.

³Jackson, op. cit., p. 117.

⁴"Dandyism is ever the outcome of a carefully cultivated temperament. . . . Dandyism is, after all, one of the decorative arts."

⁵IV (February 15, 1896).

⁶Critic, XXVI (July 18, 1896), 42-48.

⁷Atlantic, LXXVIII (November, 1896), 716.

With equal discretion the Nation said, "Mr. Beerbohm's volume is one of conceits, marked by a good deal of humor and cleverness, and marred by a single fault that he has little or nothing to say. Under these circumstances it is not without reason that he sings the praises of the artificial."¹

The wary reserve which the periodicals of the "standard" class retained even in the case of Beerbohm is as indicative as anything else of the essential incompatibility of decadence and traditional American culture at the end of the century. In Beerbohm's case, the reserve later turned to hostility, at least on the part of reactionaries like the Gilders. A caricature of Max by Beardsley appeared in the Critic with a statement indicating that the essayist-cartoonist was of too light weight to deserve better treatment.² Beerbohm's drawings received an out-and-out drubbing:

A fatal result of faddishness, or yellowness, or whatever the disease may be, is Max Beerbohm. . . . This gentleman has found in fad publications an opportunity for working off a lot of drawings such as small boys confine to their slates. These he labels with well- (or ill-) known names, and they are put forth as caricatures. In his slate drawing of Aubrey Beardsley, Mr. Beerbohm has given an excellent example of his talent.³

A rumor to the effect that Oscar Wilde and George Moore had collaborated on it accompanied Robert Hichens' The Green Carnation upon its first introduction to America.⁴ The Dial compared Esme to Mr. Rose, a caricature of Walter Pater in Mallock's New Republic, but nevertheless recognized the likeness of Oscar Wilde. "There is a certain cleverness, although of a cheap sort, in this kind of writing, but a whole volume of it grows wearisome. . . . We are not surprised to hear that 'The Green Carnation' has made something of a flutter in London. But we shall be greatly surprised if anyone is found to read it ten years from now."⁵ The Dial's prediction was wrong, however. The Green Carnation was among the first fifteen books in favor in the New York bookshops in January,

¹Nation, XLIII (September 10, 1896), 202.

²Critic, XXXIII (July-August, 1898), 21.

³Ibid., XXX (January 2, 1897), 12.

⁴Chap-book, II (November 15, 1894), 37.

⁵Dial, XVII (November 1, 1894), 266-67.

1895,¹ and swept the country to the Pacific Coast. Upon the strength of this popularity, Hichens was another British writer who proposed a trip to America, and Peck looked forward to meeting the author "whose lively satire, The Green Carnation, made such a distinct hit last year . . . whether for notoriety or fame is for readers to judge."²

The works of "Fiona Macleod" (William Sharp) were not sufficiently well known in this country to be reviewed. Sharp, however, was a contributor of rather frequent articles to American periodicals on British literary and artistic movements.³ His novel, The Sin-Eater, was published by Stone and Kimball of Chicago, in October, 1895, but was not successful.

Even though Americans were not well acquainted with a good many of the younger writers, the Yellow Book was widely known. Its fame spread rapidly, leaving a steady stream of denunciation and a thinner stream of little imitative periodicals. The "standard" attitude toward it was, of course, voiced by the more important journals, which, although impressed by its imposing list of contributors, heartily disapproved of its purpose and spirit. It was a combination of the hated end-of-the-century skepticism and lassitude and the untrustworthy spirit of modernity. From every point of view it represented revolt from Victorian standards of taste; it was a product of the "new freedom" which American critics like Charles Dudley Warner could write about glibly in an abstract sense, but which was a really frightening phenomenon when viewed close at hand. Fred L. Pattee probably speaks reminiscently when he says,

The "Yellow Book" soon became the symbol of fin de siècle. A most mild and ladylike affair as we view it today against the background of modern "realism," it was everywhere looked upon as a kind of red flag of revolution, a literary bombshell with sputtering fuse. "It was considered," according to S. S. McClure, "a very bold publication in those days, a rather daring book to have on one's table."⁴

Like the "improper" novels imported from France and England and

¹Bookman, I (February, 1895), 63.

²Ibid., II (July-August, 1895), 3.

³See "William Morris: the Man and His Work," Atlantic, LXXVIII (December, 1896), 768 ff., and "Sir Edward Burne-Jones," Atlantic, LXXXII (September, 1898), 375 ff.

⁴The New American Literature (New York: Century, 1930), p. 11.

either denounced by critics or dismissed as beneath the notice of a cultured man of letters, the Yellow Book was read widely, and in many cases appreciatively. Chicago and San Francisco seem to have been particularly impressed, since it was in those cities that the vogue of "fad" periodicals started. Of this almost over-night growth of small, ephemeral magazines, more will be said later. It was perhaps the most interesting phase of the history of European influence during the nineties.

The Gilders of the Critic were, of course, instantly in arms:

The amount of attention that this periodical has attracted is proof, if any were needed, that the mountebank in his motley can call the crowd; but is that all that the editors of this quarterly are aiming at? Have they yet to learn that notoriety is not fame? They claim that the 'Yellow Book' is the embodiment of the modern spirit. If this is true, then give us the good old-fashioned spirit of "Harper's," the "Century," and "Scribner's," whose aim is to please intelligent people and not to attract attention by "tripping the cockawhoop" in public.¹

The Atlantic followed soon after with a satirical review, making light of the frantic efforts of the "moderns":

. . . the fashion seems to be that of day after tomorrow, and that is two days away. Much may happen tomorrow; possibly a return to nobility, purity and high ideals in literature and art. We commend to some of his associates in The Yellow Book Mr. Waugh's vigorous contribution on Reticence in Literature.²

The comments west of the Alleghenies were more moderate, but no periodical of importance could more than faintly praise the ambition of the English magazine. The Dial objected to the Beardsley cover. It was impressed by the names in the list of contributors, but thought that "not more than two or three of them

¹Critic, XXIV (May, 1894), 360.

²Atlantic, LXXIV (August, 1894), 275.

"The present reign of the queer has reached its climax in the 'Yellow Book' (Philadelphia Record, August 2, 1894). "As to the raison d'être of the 'Yellow Book'—the periodical seems to fill the function of presenting to the public things that other magazines refuse to publish, and which were better left unsaid" (Boston Commonwealth, August 9, 1894).

The Atlantic said of an English novel, The Woman Who Did Not, by "Victoria Cross" (Vivien Cory) that it ". . . belongs to the ordinary class of what may be called Yellow-Book fiction. It is, of course, the history of a woman who, having an unsatisfactory husband, nobly refuses to accept the love of a man for whom she has conceived an ardent attachment. . . . We find the

were represented by their better work." The review closed with a surprising statement for the Dial: "There is nothing timely about any of the comments so far as subject matter is concerned."¹

The second and third numbers of the Yellow Book were received in the same way. It is evident that they were read by many people, and that the possession of a copy was a sign of fashionable modernity, but the magazine critics were never favorable. The Dial said of the second number that it was an improvement over the first, but that the articles were "often amateurish" and had "too marked a flavor of impressionism."² Harry Thurston Peck was cautious concerning the fourth number: "There is greater average merit in the latest number of The Yellow Book than in the former ones, but there is no one feature that stands out prominently, unless it be the fearsome picture of Mr. George Moore."³ About the same time the Dial commented on the large number of familiar artists and writers who appeared in the magazine, but in general disparaged their work as too ostentatious and juvenile.⁴ An article appeared in the Critic which summarized nicely for future generations both the popular and the critical appraisal of the Yellow Book:

The editors of The Yellow Book attracted attention to that quarterly at first by the novelty of its make-up, if not by the originality of their ideas. People laughed at the thing, but they bought it; and they found some things between its covers that were worth reading. While there was much that was absurd in it, there was the saving grace of apparent earnestness, and one felt that the young men who were responsible for it at least believed in their methods and had definite ideas in their heads. In subsequent numbers of the quarterly, there was a decided falling-off, and people were merely bored by the vulgar eccentricities of Mr. Beardsley's pencil and Mr. Beerbohm's pen. This would not do. The Yellow Book must be talked about—it must

atmosphere of the tale none the less malodorous because it is that to which numerous writers of the hour, mostly women, are strenuously endeavoring to accustom us" (LXXVII [January, 1896], 129-30.

¹Dial, XVI (June 1, 1894), 335-36.

²Ibid., XVII (October 1, 1894), 200.

³Bookman, I (February, 1895), 54.

⁴Dial, XVIII (March 1, 1895), 154-55.

startle the reader, at whatever cost. The fourth volume, now at hand, will be talked about, but the price to be paid for its notoriety is a high one—the loss of the respect of decent people. There is nothing clever in the indecent poems and stories that go to the making of this number. They pander to a depraved taste. We sometimes tolerate indecency when it is clothed with art, but the indecencies of The Yellow Book are not clothed at all.¹

An equally censorious review appeared in the Nation:

The second number of "The Yellow Book" continues the research for eccentricity of the first, and contains much the same mixture of good and bad. The cover is as offensive in design as the first one, but exhibits the same crudity of color. Among the pictures, the good is represented by an exquisite drawing of Henry James by John Sargent. . . . Next to this comes a "Renaissance of Venus" by Walter Crane, which has grace and charm, but not strength. The rest is "impressionism" and affectation, the acme of which is perhaps reached in Mr. P. Wilson Steer's "Portrait of Himself," in which most of the canvas is occupied by the figure of a girl en chemise putting on her shoe, while the artist is crowded into the background, and his head is entirely cut off by the frame. . . . Mr. Aubrey Beardsley is as conspicuous by his rapid and vulgar attempts at French chic as before. In a review of the first number printed in the second, which is one of the novelties the editors have introduced, one is surprised to find Mr. Hamerton taking Mr. Beardsley quite seriously, and even calling him "a man of genius"! Another echo of No. 1 is Mr. Beerbohm's explanation that his "Defense of Cosmetics" is a "hoax" and a "burlesque," and that the critics, whom he violently berates, have made fools of themselves. Perhaps he is burlesquing again, for the style of his diatribe is nearly as full of affectations as was that of the original essay. Mr. James contributes another of his subtle and circumlocutory studies, and there is a little poem by Austin Dobson. The rest of the contents we will pass in silence.²

The fifth volume appeared after the news of Wilde's trial. Peck commented on the change which had taken place in the Yellow Book and indicated that he hoped its turn to respectability might commend it more to American critics. He wrote that "certain occurrences in London, which it is not necessary to mention more specifically, have had a very marked influence upon the tone of the present number of The Yellow Book. It is not only free from any suspicion of moral slime, but, in its literary features at least, appears to have abandoned its former eccentricity."³ The Dial was prompt as usual to offer compliments on the dis-

¹Critic, XXVI (February 16, 1895), 131.

²Nation, LIX (August 23, 1894), 143.

³Bookman, I (July, 1895), 423.

tinguished roster of contributors, but disliked the illustrations: "For the art of the present volume, there is not much to be said. It is sometimes interesting, that is all."¹

As a matter of fact, the loss of Beardsley's influence and quality was sadly felt. The reviews after his separation from the Yellow Book staff indicate that, in spite of editorial fulminations, the leading critics had been entertained by the magazine and were a little saddened because it was being tamed. Miss Gilder wrote:

The Yellow Book is shorn of its yellowness: it is nothing now but book. Some of the old writers are to be found in its seventh number, but they are not their old selves. . . . Really, the sophomoric naughtiness of the earlier volumes of The Yellow Book were brilliant compared with this.²

Peck took the opportunity to say that Volume 7 laid "more serious claim than any of the previous numbers to our studious attention," and noted the influence of Henry James.³ Yet, Peck was soon to see that the magazine was not its old self and could not regain its faddish popularity: "We understand that Messrs. Copeland and Day will discontinue the publication of The Yellow Book. The literature of this quarterly is better now than ever, yet since Aubrey Beardsley dropped out of it, its popular vogue seems to have declined."⁴ Even the Atlantic was a little sorrowful that so exciting a phenomenon was passing:

Its continuance upon the lines on which it was first framed appears to have been abandoned. Its yellow is as bright without, but far paler within. The cult of which it was originally the prophet is expressing itself far more quietly, at least here, and the Yellow Book is correspondingly less exciting, both to Philistine enemies and to initiated admirers.⁵

But the Chap-book with the characteristic perverse antagonism of the small magazines toward others of their class, even their famous prototype, declared that the Yellow Book had "passed from strong drink to tea," and confessed itself glad for the change which had carried the London journal "into its element."⁶

¹Dial, XIX (July 16, 1895), 53.

²Critic, XXVII (November 30, 1895), 371.

³Bookman, II (December, 1895), 372.

⁴Ibid., III (July, 1896), 391.

⁵Atlantic, LXXVIII (November, 1896), 716.

⁶Chap-book, VI (March 15, 1897), 370.

After the excitement caused by the Yellow Book, the Savoy found few Americans interested in what it offered. The more conservative magazine critics, not accustomed to recognizing a foreign phenomenon until it was well established, paid it no attention at all, for it died in a few months. The Chap-book was the only periodical which concerned itself much about it, and that in an antagonistic fashion. Commenting on the announcement of the new magazine, the editor said,

[Symons and Beardsley] are men of great cleverness and no little real ability, but men who are decadent in the unpleasant sense of the word. Mr. Symons has become notorious for his immoral pose; he has sought a reputation for wickedness and, in some quarters, he has doubtless been successful. His latest book, "London Nights," is a simple calendar of depravity. . . . As for Mr. Aubrey Beardsley, he is a man of such splendid gifts that one had hoped to overlook qualities less attractive. His work, however, has often been so obtrusively indecent that this is impossible. At best, one has many misgivings as to the morality of his future work. . . . The announcement of the new magazine would hardly lead us to believe that decadent days are over or that degeneration is any the less pronounced. The reaction against the "new school" which followed the Wilde trial . . . was not lasting; the fin-de-siècle pose was not worn out, and now it comes to us again in all its unattractiveness. It cannot last. "The Savoy" is absurd, impossible, and Mr. Leonard Smithers, the publisher, will soon find it out. . . .¹

Later, Smithers was thoroughly vilified in the same journal:

Mr. Smithers has long been known to a select circle of lovers of indecency as a publisher of the avowedly erotic. . . . The avowedly erotic has not been faring so very well lately, since the Yellow Book went to the good. . . . In truth, until the Savoy appeared we were not well supplied with immorals in respectable guise.²

When news of the Savoy's decrease came, the Chap-book jocularly called it the "Pink 'Un of the Decadence," which "decidedly proved its title to speak for the Decadents. . . . by flopping to a mournful death, Mr. Arthur Symons playing the Hindoo widow and entombing himself with the sad remains."³

¹Chap-book, IV (December 1, 1895), 98-99.

²Ibid. (May 1, 1896), 596.

³Ibid. (March 15, 1896), 370.

Several critics hailed the Anglo-Saxon Review as the long-hoped-for literary journal for the Anglo-Saxon race. For example, the Critic's opinion: "The initial volume of The Anglo-Saxon Review is a thing of beauty, and should be a joy forever. In outward appearance it is all that its publisher, Mr. John Lane, claimed that it would be. . . . The similarity between the first

Peck's Bookman and the Atlantic represented characteristically divergent opinions concerning William Butler Yeats and Francis Thompson, the Atlantic speaking the majority opinion and the Bookman that of the small minority. Yeats, propagandist as well as poet, was succeeding in transplanting symbolism from Paris to Ireland,¹ and was therefore an object of suspicion. In November, 1895, Peck spoke of Yeats as "one of the younger men among the English minor poets to whose career one looks with keen hope and faith,"² but before long the Atlantic saw the pernicious element of symbolism in The Countess Kathleen: "In The Princess Cathleen [sic] he is on the track of Maeterlinck, and something of the hectic intensity and sick insistent horror of that writer enters in to lay a numbering hand on the poet's vital fancy."³ The Nation dissociated the Celtic renaissance from the London movement and gave Yeats high praise as "perhaps the most interesting figure in English contemporary poetry, as he, with his following—Lionel Johnson, Katherine Tynan Hinkson, and the like—afford, with their Celtic fantasy and purity, the best antidote to that now besmirched Oscar Wilde spirit which still asserts itself sometimes in the "Yellow Book" and even in the 'Rhymer's Club."⁴ The same journal believed that the theme of The Countess Kathleen—the young countess selling her soul to the witches for the relief of others, saving it in the selling--was "nobler than the Faust legend,"⁵ and that the author of The Celtic Twilight had a "viva-

number of The Anglo-Saxon Review and The Yellow Book is marked by the English papers. The first volume of The Yellow Book had a story by Mr. Henry James and a play by John Oliver Hobbes, but here, it seems to me, the similarity ends. . . . In her introduction, the editor, Lady Randolph Spencer Churchill reminds us of the ephemeral nature of modern periodicals: 'The newspapers of today light the fires of tomorrow.' Such a fate will never befall The Anglo-Saxon Review. . . . Only one thousand copies are apportioned to the United States. Only one thousand copies of a six-dollar review for a country with seventy million inhabitants—mostly millionaires!" (Critic, XIX [August, 1889], 680.)

¹Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 24.

²Bookman, II, 258-59.

³Atlantic, LXXVIII (September, 1896), 425.

⁴Nation, LXI (December 12, 1895), 430.

⁵Ibid., LV (December 15, 1892), 452.

cious, clear-cut manner of narrating and moralizing."¹

In a review of Thompson's Sister Songs, Peck wrote impulsively that the author was a poet who had "an intimate knowledge of the eternal simple verities that appeal to all the world."² But the Atlantic saw in New Poems not much but obscurity and "general dissolution . . . which permeates decadent writings":

What can best be said of such wilful obscurity? Its best excuse is that it is not peculiar to the writer, but characteristic of one large branch of the decadent school to which he belongs. It is pathological. In an age normally poetical, the common daily happenings easily pass into song, and poetry is the expression of a complete life. The man of contorted, half-dazed intelligence will hardly be received as a poet, however he may pique curiosity as an oracle. But in a mechanical prosaic period, when the current of healthy activity turns strongly in another direction, the singer is too often not the strong man, the wise sane seer, but one whose nerves are tingling with abnormal excitement, and whose imagination is tormented by unseizable phantasmagoria. In place of poetry that is a true criticism of life, various schools of decadence start up, appealing each to its own coterie. Unintelligibility here is a seal of genuineness, and escapes censure.

This obscurity, moreover, is one of the signs of that general dissolution, or confusion, of the mind and senses which permeates decadent writing. First of all, the language loses its firm mould, archaic expressions jostle side by side with neologisms, common words taken on uncommon meanings, compounds are formed contrary to all recognized linguistic laws. . . . A small sheaf may serve as specimens: fledge-foot, ensuit, gardenered, skiey-gendered, liberal-leaved, bleakening . . . transpicuous, blosmy . . . huest, sultry (as a verb), perceivingness, etc. . . . A further confusion may be observed in the curious interchange of the tributes and epithets of the several senses, especially of sight and hearing. Anyone familiar with the works of Mallarme and his compeers will recognize this characteristic mark. The blind, it is said, substitute for colors the various sensations of sound, the word "red," in one case, at least, producing an impression like the blare of trumpets. It is not uninteresting to compare this phenomenon with the following:-

"So fearfully the sun doth sound
Clanging up behind Cathay.

"Though I the Orient never more shall feel
Break like a clash of cymbals."

Still deeper than this confusion of language and sensation is the atony of mind that is the very creating spirit of decadence. Two tendencies may be observed: a proneness to neurotic sensuality on the one hand, and a hankering after mysticism on the other; both springing from relaxation of the will and a consequent loss of grip on realities. These

¹Ibid., LIX (December 20, 1895), 464.

²Bookman, II (October, 1895), 141.

tendencies may appear singly, or may be united as in the case of Verlaine. In Mr. Thompson sensuality is the last reproach to be offered; he shows, indeed, everywhere entire purity of feeling. Mysticism, however, pervades the book from beginning to end. Now, mysticism is not rashly to be condemned along with a vein of genuine ideality, there is, we fear, a good deal of vague reverie which arises rather from super-excited nerves than from strong self-restrained thought. . . .¹

In the same volume the Nation disliked "An Anthem of Earth" and was moderately pleased with "Ex Oro Infantum." The book as a whole was disappointing.

. . . . those who founded high hopes on Mr. Thompson's earlier poems, and thought that under improved conditions his really fine mind would clarify itself and yield sweeter and more pellucid waters, must be still left in uncertainty. The habit of the wierd, the involved, the distorted, has gone too far, and in this volume as in the other, the traits of sweetness and simplicity are quite exceptional.²

After failing to attract much attention with his English Poems,³ Richard Le Gallienne inaugurated his conquest of America decorously with The Religion of a Literary Man (1894), of which the Atlantic said that ". . . reverence and constructive readjustment of beliefs distinguish it to a high degree. . . . Many books of the same kind must be written in the years immediately to come, and it will be well if for each class of men in turn so individual a word may be spoken."⁴ Le Gallienne's gay sentimentalizing of his material won him almost universal favor with American critics who accepted his presentation of essentially decadent points of view at the same time that they were berating the more serious treatment by other writers. Concerning Prose Fancies even the Atlantic was only mildly censorious, calling it graceful and gay, but "affected by what we may term a journalistic consciousness, a cleverness of the moment which means good 'copy.'"⁵ The Bookman was enthusiastic about Robert Louis Stevenson: an

¹Atlantic, LXXX (August, 1897), 276-77.

²Nation, LXV (December 9, 1897), 460.

³Ibid., LV (December 15, 1892), 452: "London poetry would seem to be in a bad way when it can only be cured of affectation by inoculating it with some other affectation."

⁴Atlantic, LXXIII (April, 1894), 567.

⁵Ibid., LXXIV (October, 1894), 567.

Elegy and Other Poems,¹ and concerning Prose Fancies (Second Series) the Atlantic declared, "Behind the exuberant nonsense and the airy sentimentalizing we feel real penetration and real tenderness."²

The Quest of the Golden Girl, a kind of sentimental journey which Muddiman calls "watered-down Wilde,"³ was immensely popular. As Jackson says, ". . . with delicate indelicacy he [Le Gallienne] translated the emotional unrest of the hour into a fancifully impossible romance which future generations will read for delight or for a truthful, though not impartial picture of a certain corner of the age."⁴ The Critic declared that "charm is the word which describes the pervading quality of this book," and commented on the fact that the author was obviously a well-read man.⁵ Even Elbert Hubbard, who was ordinarily so clamorous for books that offered "meat for men," liked it: "In that book the author has recorded some of the things that every man dreams. . . ."⁶

The Chap-book was one of the first to dissent from these opinions, retorting valiantly, "No one without a solid basis of vulgarity could write as Mr. Le Gallienne does. . . . Mr. Le Gallienne's pathos is mere caterwauling; his rhapsodies, hysteria; his sentiment, mawkishness: his outlook on life, a mixture of ignorance and effeminacy."⁷ A Bookman writer also was worried about the popularity of The Quest of the Golden Girl, believing that the author, intending to satirize a characteristic of the decade, had struck too deeply and penetrated more sacred precincts:

This is, of course, only Mr. Le Gallienne's manner of satirising certain branches of so-called "advanced thought," of which the New Virtue is perhaps the most conspicuous illustration. But, unfortunately, he has done it rather too artistically, so that the caricature has all the finish, the fascination, and the importance of a serious painting. The

¹I (July, 1895), 408-09.

²LXXVIII (October, 1896), 569.

³Men of the Nineties (London: Danielson, 1920), p. 5.

⁴Op. cit., p. 226.

⁵XXX (January 9, 1897), 21.

⁶Philistine, V (July, 1897), 49.

⁷Chap-book, VII (July 15, 1897), 224.

final feeling of the work is the uneasy perception that its charm is more dangerous than it seemed at the outset, and that its mockery does not merely play irreverently round the pinnacles of our loftiest ideals, but menaces the very foundations of all that is safest and sweetest in life.¹

When The Romance of Zion Chapel appeared, the Chap-book spoke with a sneer of ". . . that devil of a pretty fellow . . . with his pose—now a little set—of intimate acquaintance with the roses and raptures of vice."² In 1898 Le Gallienne was lecturing in America, The Chap Book printed a picture of him in velvet knee-breeches, flowing tie, and with long hair topped with a peculiar pancake hat.³ Perhaps because of this picture, or because personal acquaintance with the visiting lecturer brought up memories of Oscar Wilde, the Critic turned against him, and in reviewing Young Lives, a book about literary life in London, compared it unfavorably with Mrs. Humphry Ward's David Grieve and Barrie's When a Man's Single. The reviewer concluded, "He takes himself seriously, and is taken in the same way by a few whose critical faculty seems to be in abeyance."⁴ But in spite of critical attacks on his later books, Le Gallienne's admirers continued to be numerous. His lecture tour was not successful financially, but the fact that the Gallic Englishman could even appear in America, wearing almost the same costume made notorious by Wilde and saying nearly the same things (only less brilliantly), without bringing journalistic wrath down upon his head, is as good an indication as any of the change which two decades had made in American critical attitudes. The change, however, was in popular attitudes, and was hardly noticeable in the columns of criticism in the standard periodicals, whose feeling toward the "Gallic smirch" is shown in the following review of The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club:

On the whole, the exhibit is promising and indicates a little reaction against the French imitation: Mr. W. B. Yeats taking easily the lead in the group, by reason of his marvelous Celtic grasp upon the night-side of mysteries and what he

¹George Preston in the Bookman, IV (February, 1897), 567.

²Chap-book, VIII (April 15, 1898), 450. Peck reviewed this book favorably (Bookman, VII [June, 1898], 349-50).

³Chap-book, VIII (March 15, 1898), 352.

⁴Critic, XXXV (July, 1899), 647.

himself calls "The Folk of the Air." Yet no poem by him in this little volume is so remarkable or haunting as his former drama, "The Countess Kathleen," or as his little detached and slender volume of Irish legend, "The Land of Heart's Desire" (Chicago: Stone and Kimball), which surpasses all the rest. Although disfigured and blighted in the publishing by one of Mr. Beardsley's ugliest and most meaningless frontispieces, the poem itself is as rare and unique as a witch-hazel blossom: it is of the air airy; a proof that pure fantasy will not perish out of the world while the Celtic races survive. And the manly purity of these poems—the utter freedom from the Gallic smirch—is refreshing when compared with the sickly and jaunty sensualism of Mr. Arthur Symons, who represents the low-water mark of the "Rhymers' Club."¹

Perhaps as good a way as any to show why certain movements met with so little favor is to indicate what imported literature American critics did like throughout the entire twenty years. That is best illustrated by Austin Dobson and Kipling in poetry, and Stevenson, Du Maurier, and Rider Haggard in prose fiction.

Austin Dobson was by far the most popular of the younger English poets of the early eighties and contributed much to American periodicals.² He had been introduced by no less a person than Edmund Clarence Stedman, who called him "that sweetest modern Horace,"³ and declared that "Dobson's work is perfect of its kind."⁴ It was Dobson's influence predominantly which introduced the French forms of light verse to young American poets, who used them to a large extent and with considerable facility. In fact, the only specific part of the so-called "revolt of the nineties" which was eminently successful was the acceptance and wise use of the light measures.⁵ Brander Matthews, himself one of the younger

¹Nation, LIX (November 22, 1894), 388.

²See the Century, IV (October, 1883), 954.

³Letter to Gosse in Life and Letters of Edmund Clarence Stedman, II, 15.

⁴Ibid., p. 73.

⁵Some of the Americans using the French forms for light verse were Oscar Fay Adams, H. C. Bunner, Brander Matthews, Clinton Scollard, and Francis Saltus.

See Edgar Lee Masters' "Petit the Poet," whom Pattee (The New American Literature, p. 195) calls the laureate of the period:

"Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,
Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,
Tick, tick, tick, what little iambics,
While Whitman and Homer roared in the pines!"

(Spoon River Anthology [New York: Macmillan, 1925], p. 89.)

literary men who kept on polite, but safe, speaking terms with foreign literature, contributed a characteristic essay on Dobson:

To Mr. Dobson, the young school of American writers of familiar verse look up as to a master. Next to the airy grace and the flowing and unfailing humor which informs all Mr. Dobson's poems, perhaps the quality which most deserves to be singled out is their frank and hearty wholesomeness. There is nothing sickly about them, or morbid, or perverse, as there is about so much contemporary British verse. Mr. Dobson is entirely free from the besetting sin of those minor poets who sing only in a minor key. He has no trace of affectation, and no taint of sentimentality.¹

Kipling was hardly the favorite with literary critics that Dobson was, but he had a large following, especially during his residence in Brattleboro, Vermont. There were seventeen American editions and reprints of various Kipling books in 1897, and thirty-five in 1898. Elbert Hubbard said that he was "meat for men";² the Dial believed that Barrack Room Ballads gave to English patriotism "such a voice as its most inspired singers have rarely given it";³ and when the Bookman said, ". . . . he is loud, but is he sincere?" the Chap-book replied, "No comment is possible on such a question. One can only transcribe it in gaping wonderment."⁴ But as early as 1892 the Nation was a little tired of Kipling, saying, "The author's stock in trade is now familiar, and his verses rarely have that effect as a whole which was sometimes exerted by fragments of them, when prefixed to his stories. The 'garlic flavor,' as it has been called, remains the same."⁵

Stevenson was the darling of all critics and readers who rebelled against the tendency toward realism. His works had good sales during the nineties, and only the voices of the minority of the critics who preferred realism were raised against him. Because of his romantic tendencies he was sometimes popularly associated with "yellow" writing, but because he contained little sensuality or moral heresy the association was just enough to render him fashionable rather than objectionable. He was fin de

¹"Austin Dobson," Century, VI (October, 1894), 912-13.

²Philistine, V (July, 1897), 56.

³XIII (September 16, 1892), 186.

⁴Chap-Book, VII (July 15, 1897), 202.

⁵Nation, LV (July 7, 1892), 11.

siècle romantic who found it possible to remain respectable.

The yellow and lavender carouse of the early 90's brought Stevenson into high relief. . . . His name was suddenly invoked, as an image of chastity, against this terrible crew whose products agitated William Watson and scared the producers themselves. They advertised yesterday's mistresses and tomorrow's satiety in verses wildly graceful as a painted Easter egg. . . . The whole temper of the crowd was toward a species of languid exhibitionism that makes one grin.¹

Peck, romanticist that he was, was disturbed by the association of Stevenson with the decadents, believing that it would harm his reputation:

The most irritating of all experiences to the lover of Stevenson . . . is to find him identified with the clique of literary dilettantes. . . . What the public means by "Decadence" is the amateurish and the eccentric in current literature, the wilful departure from normal standards, Stevenson should not be classed by the public who do not know him in the category of dilettantes just because certain young men, who think that art is all made up of having a good time, claim Stevenson, the son of joy, as their prophet.²

The Chicago magazines were against him. The Chap-book was of the opinion that "Stevenson has been unreasonably admired by the present generation; by the next, if he is read at all, he will be as unreasonably disparaged";³ and the Dial believed that there was "no virility of conception" in The Master of Ballantrae and that the characters were but "ghostly outlines" and the author "inconsequent."⁴ At Stevenson's death, however, there was an enormous memorial meeting held in Carnegie Hall on January 4, 1895. Stedman presided, and the honorary vice-presidents included practically everybody of any literary importance in America. Speeches were made by Stedman, Andrew Carnegie, Eggleston, David Christie Murray, George W. Cable, and John Foord.⁵ The majority opinion concerning Stevenson was spoken by the Nation: "In the art that appeals to the imagination alone,

¹Beer, The Mauve Decade, pp. 179-80.

²Bookman, IV (November, 1896), 187.

³Chap-book, VII (July 15, 1897), 201.

⁴Dial, X (December, 1889), 214.

⁵Critic, XXVI (January 12, 1885), 29 ff.

Poe towers above Stevenson; in the art that stirs the soul, moving men to stretch out feeble hands to good for good's sake, Poe sinks beneath comparison with Stevenson."¹

W. D. Howells was sharply taken to task by a Chicagoan, Samuel M. Clark, for disapproving of the sort of novels that Rider Haggard was producing. "Mr. Howells's apostleship of inanity and the common-place," said Clark, "comes to a bitter end that we have some malicious pleasure in: it is made inaudible in the noise of the whole novel-reading world of England and America clamoring about the book counters for 'She' and 'King Solomon's Mines'!" He added that Haggard had "freshened and quickened literature by showing in a distinctive and original way that the stories are not all told."² Later the Dial voiced popular approbation by stating that Montezuma's Daughter "justified the pains taken by the author by making his observations on the spot."³ The conservative magazines, however, demurred from popular opinion, the Atlantic calling Haggard a "barbarian of an author . . . a dime novelist, whatever clothes he wears."⁴ The Nation was equally bitter:

It is said that thirteen separate American issues of Mr. Haggard's 'She' are now in circulation. The fact must naturally be gratifying to the author, but it is not distinctly creditable to the literary taste and cultivation of Americans. Gross impossibilities without number, pages of platitudinous reflection, a smattering of learning, scenes that are revolting, scenes that are indecent—all that is 'She,' and that is all 'She' is. Nevertheless, thousands of people have read 'She,' and probably thousands more are waiting for a chance. In the face of this spectacle, the only criticism of any value would have to take the shape of an essay on the advantages of not knowing how to read.⁵

For sheer popularity, Du Maurier's Trilby has seldom been surpassed in America. It was first published in Harper's in 1894,

¹Nation, XLIV (May 19, 1887), 430. The "Kail-Yard school" of Scotch dialect fiction was also popular in America. "Ian Maclaren" made a triumphant tour of the country, and Elbert Hubbard joined the majority of critics in saying of Barrie's Margaret Ogilby, "The book is sincere, delicate and sweet as music that comes stealing across soft seas. I read it with misty eyes and a lump in my throat" (Philistine, V [July, 1897], 60).

²Dial, XXII (May, 1897), 6-7.

³Ibid., XVI (January 1, 1894), 18.

⁴Atlantic, LXVI (November, 1890), 719.

⁵Nation, XLIV (June 23, 1897), 533.

with the enthusiastic sanction of Charles Dudley Warner.¹ Even more than the novels of Haggard and Stevenson it was hailed as an agreeable antidote for the melancholic realism of Zola and his followers. It was sufficiently tinged with bohemianism to be intriguing, but was without objectionable mysticism or symbolism. There was a stage version by Peerbohm Tree which was pirated successfully in America. The "Trilby type" had a great influence on illustrators and poster draftsmen,² and the novel's triumphal march inspired concerts, tableaux, burlesques, sermons, and sau-sages. Even the Atlantic broke into paeans of praise: "The spontaneity . . . sweeps away judgment as one reads; one simply abandons oneself to the book, and only fears that he may not keep up with the author's pace."³ The staid Nation said that ". . . by casting back over a long line of years, between memory and imagination, he has written chapters of real life glorified by the most tender and enchanting romance—told us of a dead past all radiant, and glowing now with the purple light of a vanished youth."⁴ Henry James sent an article to Harper's,⁵ expressing mild satisfaction with the book. Brander Matthews commented on the novel's sudden success, but risked his reputation by saying that, delightful as it was, it was not a masterpiece of narrative art.⁶ The popular aspects of the phenomenon, however, soon became disgusting to the Atlantic:

The universal vogue of Trilby was deeply depressing to its author, than whom no man ever lived more intolerant of essential vulgarity, and one is almost glad that he had passed beyond the sphere of the illustrated newspaper before a Trilby exhibition of young ladies' feet was organized, to repair the finances of a so-called religious society.⁷

Peter Ibbetson had already been successful, the Atlantic having hailed Du Maurier as "nearly as great an artist as Hardy"

¹Harper's, LXXXIX (September, 1894), 635-36.

²Bookman, I (May, 1895), 217.

³Atlantic, LXXV (February, 1895), 269.

⁴Nation, LIX (October 25, 1894), 311.

⁵XCV (September, 1897), 594-609.

⁶"The Gift of Story Telling," Harper's, XCI (October, 1895), 717.

⁷Atlantic, LXXX (December, 1897), 852.

and criticizing only one or two of the "dreaming true" scenes.¹ In 1898 the Critic commented delightedly on Du Maurier's parody on the Pre-Raphaelites and aesthetes in A Legend of Camelot, in which the heroine says,

"To do and suffer ere I die,
I care not what, I know not why."²

As has been noted, Du Maurier's attack in caricature on aestheticism was familiar to Americans considerably before Oscar Wilde's visit. As might be suspected, his drawings chiefly had the effect of interesting people in the movement as a new kind of entertainment, rather than as a serious evangelism. Peck recalled this fact when the Trilby craze was at its height, saying, "He [Du Maurier] elevated the aesthetic fad to the position of a genuine craze even in satirising it, and in a way made possible not only the broad burlesque of Mr. Gilbert's Patience, but a widespread interest in the erratic productions of The Yellow Book school."³

Fad Periodicals

From the standpoint of literary novelties, one of the most interesting phenomena of the 1890's was the swarm of small, "arty" magazines, "variously named Chap-books, Ephemerals, Bibelots, Brownie Magazines, Fadazines, Magazettes, Freak Magazines."⁴ Periodicals of this class were distinguished usually by the use of hand-made, deckle-edged paper, usually colored or tinted, exquisite typography, and a medieval touch as to format. Some of them were published irregularly, whenever the editors had the time or the copy, the nonchalant character being indicated sometimes by such descriptive material on the covers as "Printed whenever the spirit moves." Each possessed a spirit of literary bravado, an air of deliberately flouting the conventions, a perverse kind of egotism, and invariably a supreme contempt for other

¹Atlantic, LXIX (May, 1892), 706.

²Critic, XXXIII (September, 1898), 198-99.

³Bookman, IV (November, 1896), 184.

⁴Frederick W. Faxon, "Ephemeral Bibelots: A Bibliography," Bulletin of Bibliography, April, 1903, p. 72.

magazines of the same type.¹ Percival Pollard, himself a participant in the movement, described it thus:

Only for a short period in the last decade of the nineteenth century was there the slightest effort away from commercial art in America. That was during the reign of what we may call the pamphlet and poster movements.

After the Chicago Exposition of 1893, which had done something to spur the American life toward appreciation of the finer things of life, there ensued a period of material depression, which did not lift until 1895. There began one of the most curious revivals of taste that our time has witnessed . . . there appeared a crop of strangely fashioned periodicals, preaching fantastic doctrines, uttering wierd thoughts, but all expressive of youth and dreams of non-commercial art.²

The reason for the sudden and astonishingly rapid growth of these bibelots is hard to determine. Doubtless many of them were started because the editors saw others flourishing. Faxon believes that they were motivated to a large extent by young, ambitious writers who found it difficult to reach the columns of the standard magazines, and who were convinced that a large reading public for their brand of literature was waiting for them if they could only find a medium of publication.³ To a very large extent they were imitative. Faxon's list of two hundred or more shows how imitation was added to imitation and burlesque to burlesque until the whole intricate structure collapsed when the

¹"The Purple Cow Period of American letters is synchronous with The Yellow Book. Period in England, that is, it corresponds to what is now referred to jeeringly by the Younger Generation as 'The Gay 'Nineties.' And in sober truth that is not such a bad title, for the most characteristic literary products of that particular decade were inspired far more by the play-spirit than those of today. The era found perhaps its most acute expression in certain periodically issued, small and for the most part short-lived brochures or broadsides referred to in the slang of the day as the Dinkey Magazines, each of which expressed the attitude and point of view of an individual or a group. In the aggregate they can be characterized as 'young,' devouringly egotistical and self-assertive and either good-naturedly or bitterly critical of one another. They constituted a sort of metaphysical Fleet Street, extending from coast to coast" (Claude Bragdon, "The Purple Cow Period," Bookman, LXIX [July, 1929], 475).

"We now have the Lotus, the Lotos and the Lettuce. The latest is The Prairie Dog. Its hole is Lawrence, Kansas, and it is patterned after the Chip Munk. Verily, like begets like" (Philistine, II [April, 1896], 158).

²Their Day in Court (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1909), p. 375.

³Faxon, ibid., p. 73.

short-lived spark of vital originality was extinguished. Judging by their names, many of them were intended for nothing more than an ephemeral existence.

Before 1894 there were a few "dinkey magazines" of this type, such as The Mahogany Tree (Boston, 1892),¹ which some collectors think was the initial effort of the movement. However, the testimony of the periodicals themselves indicates that they acknowledged the Chicago Chap-book as their immediate progenitor, and the London Yellow Book as their more remote inspiration.² Gelett Burgess, in his editorial in the Epilark, in which he bade good-bye to his own bibelot, left no doubt as to his opinion of the movement:

In 1895, the "Chap Book" had already begun its successful career as the American leader of the remarkable literary revolution that made the year typical of the vagaries of the "end of the century" madness. Suddenly, without warning, the storm broke, and a flood of miniature periodicals began to pour over the land. The success of the "Chap Book" incited the little riot of Decadence, and there was a craze for odd sizes and shapes, freak illustrations, wide margins, uncut pages, Jenson types, scurrilous abuse and petty jealousies, impossible prose and doggerel rhyme. The movement asserted itself as a revolt against the commonplace; it aimed to overthrow the staid respectability of the larger magazines and to open to younger writers opportunities to be heard before they had obtained recognition from the autocratic editors. It was a wild, hap-hazard exploration in search of a short cut to Fame; it proposed to carry Prestige by storm.

But that war is almost over now, and the little wasp-like privateers that have swarmed the seas of journalism are nearly all silenced; the freak fleet has disarmed, but who knows how many are missing? Not a port but gave help to the uprising and mustered its volunteers in the fight against Convention. It was a tea-pot tempest that made them and wrecked them, and yet, when the history of the Nineteenth Century Decadence is written, these tiny eruptions of revolt, these pamphleteering amateurs cannot remain unnoticed, for their outbreak was a symbol of the discontent of the times, a wide-felt protest of emancipation from the dictates of the old literary tribunals. Little enough good has come of it that one can see at present, but the sedition is

¹Ibid., p. 72.

²"Spurned by the East, the 'Yellow Book' was hailed by the West generally as the morning star of a new day. There was in it, they believed, the time-beat of something vigorous and vital and modern. The young Chicago 'school' quickly launched out with an imitation, 'The Chap Book,' a publication as we read it today really remarkable. . . . Imitations of it quickly came by the dozens. . . . None of them all is more deserving of record than Gelett Burgess's 'Lark,' an exquisitely printed thing and most distinctively edited" (Pattee, The New American Literature, 11-12).

broached, and the next rebellion may have more blood to spill.¹

The years 1896 and 1897 were the most prosperous for the "fad" editors. Oddly colored and printed magazines of all shapes and sizes decorated news stands in profusion. Often a magazine broke forth with a first number a riot of color and a marvel of typography, never to be seen again. By 1898 most of them were dead, along with the Chap-book, and by 1900 the movement was practically a thing of the past. For a time, however, the more conservative journalists were deeply concerned. Miss Gilder, for one, broke forth with an astonishing and utterly false charge that the Chap-book was the progenitor of the Yellow Book and the Savoy.

Anyone who can hold a pen, no matter how awkwardly he holds it, and who can pay a printer, or get credit from a printer, may say what he likes in print, nowadays. "Print," therefore, has lost much of its dignity and power, for any youth just out of college, or any freshman just in college, may have his organ. Usually these organs grind bilge-music, though some of them are not without a certain smartness: it can hardly be called cleverness. The first of these fad papers was The Chap-book, and with all its shortcomings, most of them arising from juvenility, it is the best. The Yellow Book, we believe, was the first result of The Chap-book mania. This was followed by an eruption of fad journals of more or less interest—usually less. Not one of them had an excuse for being, and most of them ceased to be ere they had fairly been. Perhaps the most ambitious after The Chap-book was The Savoy. This took Aubrey Beardsley with it from The Yellow Book, and while the latter lost in yellowness, The Savoy gained in pinkness. But now The Savoy has ceased to exist, except as a bound volume. Hitherto it had known no bounds.

Few purchasers of fad periodicals ever get beyond the cover, and it is well for their peace of mind that they do not. The publishers know this, and they put their best foot on the outside. The designs for these covers must be the result of nightmares—a succession of nightmares, perhaps. What they mean, who shall say? . . . No wonder The Savoy died. If it had not died a natural death, some one would have killed it. But we must not speak ill of the dead. The Lark that wings its flight from San Francisco, has for its distinction that it introduced the Purple Cow into art. It has done other things quite as bad, but it will always be known as the inventor of the Purple Cow. After all, if there is such a freak in literature as a Yellow Book, why should there not be such a freak of nature as a Purple Cow? One does not look to a Purple Cow for milk, nor to a Yellow Book.

¹Epilark, May, 1897, no pagination.

for anything but yellowness.¹

College magazines, of course, felt the influence of the movement, which for a time was incontestable. Impressionistic criticism, drawings in black-and-white of the Beardsley type, nonsense verse and open-road poems filled their pages. In common with their commercial cousins, they assumed an attitude of aggressive and oftentimes perverse individualism, frequently satirizing the very spirit they were imitating. The Critic said, "The curse is upon the college magazines at last. They have started to become 'miniature' and sprightly and contemporaneous," and cited the Yale Courant, Bowdoin's The Quill, Columbia's The Morningside, and the Oklahoma Normal School's The Normal Philomath.

[Their editors] have read the literary magazines and reviews, and they comment on them in the editorial pages. The complaint is, not that they write badly about them, but that they should write about them at all. . . . University life in this country . . . has been the only period when men with a taste for reading have been allowed to browse among old writers without being forced—for conversational purposes—to keep up with contemporary events.²

Harry Thurston Peck, however, was more gratified than shocked at the injection of the new spirit into college papers:

The Chap-Book form of publication has been taken up by the colleges, and the first-fruits of the fad are seen in a clever little exchange that comes to us from Columbia with the title The Morningside. It is excellently written and printed, and up to the present time has disclosed few or no amateurish and immature traits. One bit of verse from the first number has already been widely quoted, but we are going to quote it again because it is so good:

"An Ass with long green ears
And pinkish hairs
Was browsing on the purple grass;
No thought he had,
He was a Beardsley Ass."³

It is not to be understood that these ephemeral periodicals advocated art for art's sake or decadence exactly in the European manner. They were likely to take the attitude of blithe Stevensonian hedonism and hold their editorial noses while deliver-

¹Critic, XXX (January 2, 1897), 12.

²Critic, XXIX (December, 1896), 391. The writer accused the college editors of reading Le Gallienne's The Quest of the Golden Girl.

³Bookman, III (March, 1896), 10.

ing diatribes on "naturalism" and "morbidity." Their link with decadence was in general trifling and artificial. The fact that they were hedonistic was extraordinary, but frequently they were frightened by their own bravado. They seldom passed a moral judgment on a book or an author, but only an occasional Criterion or Daily Tattler attacked with severity the moralistic criticism of the standard journals. Literary and artistic theories which involved serious and complex reasoning were a bore. The actual duplicating of the complete spirit of the Yellow Book by any one of their number would have caused gasps of astonishment and a scurrying for cover. However, most of them exhibited a spirit of mild sensationalism, were interested in a rather detached fashion in Verlaine and Beaudelaire, and in their attitudes toward democratic taste were characteristically egotistical and aristocratic. It was a coterie art that they represented. Their most pleasing aspect was their naive, somewhat juvenile way of self-revelation and criticism. Pomposity was universally hated.¹

It has been stated that the Chap-book was the most noteworthy of these ephemerals. In spite of occasions when its critical dicta were completely at variance with the contents of the magazine, it stood far more consistently than the rest for catholicity of taste. Its reputation was the greatest of magazines of its class, and its contributors were much more dis-

¹In the first number of the Enfant Terrible (January, 1898) was the following ballad entitled "Boston Bohemianism":

"The Orchids were as tough a crowd
As Boston anywhere allowed;
It was a club of wicked men—
The oldest, twelve, the youngest, ten;
They drank their soda colored green,
They talked of 'Art' and 'Philistine,'
They wore buff 'wescoa's' and their hair,
It used to make the waiters stare!
They were so shockingly behaved
And Boston thought them so depraved,
Policemen stationed at the door,
Would raid them every hour or more!
They used to smoke (!) and laugh out loud (!)
They were a very devilish crowd!
They formed a cult, far subtler, brainier,
Than ordinary Anglomania,
For all as Jacobites were reckoned,
And gaily toasted Charles the Second!"

tinguished.¹

While still a senior at Harvard (1893) Herbert Stone had brought out a new edition of Hamlin Garland's Main-Traveled Roads along with Prairie Songs "in such style of print and binding as no books in all America had won."² In partnership with another student, Ingalls Kimball, he started the Chap-book, and continued in spite of a threat from the Harvard faculty that they would not be graduated if it were not stopped.³ Before being transplanted to Chicago in August, 1894, the Chap-book had been issued for three months in Cambridge.⁴ With the exception of a year when Bliss Carman was editor, Stone headed the staff. The sales ran as high as fifty thousand, and averaged twenty thousand,⁵ a very respectable figure. In April, 1896, because of some differences between the partners, the publishing firm was bought out by Kimball and moved to New York.⁶ Kimball had previously been the business manager of the partnership, and the Chap-book remained in Chicago with Stone as editor and Harrison G. Rhodes as assistant. On July 15, 1898, for several reasons which are not entirely known,

¹"Like life itself it stands compact of error and truth, wisdom and folly. The notes are nearly always readable and pointed, the illustrations are often decadently bizarre and poor, the verse is amazingly unequal, the criticism is frequently capital" (Atlantic, LXXVIII [November, 1896], 717).

" . . . this cheeky little cherub of a magazine met with peculiar success. . . . The first volume took its place among the rarities of the amateur. The watchword of the magazine was: Fads! If there was no fad in existence it created one. It made a fad of artistic posters; it fostered the cult of Aubrey Beardsley's American contemporary, Will H. Bradley. In the 'Chap-Book' was found much New Humor; but eventually this enfant terrible began to give pink teas, to make much of Great Personages, and curb its bold impertinence; the novelty was exhausted; the old audacity gone; and before its pale insipidity public interest flagged and died. So, eventually, did the 'Chap-Book.' Yet it had started the movement" (Pollard, op. cit., p. 376).

²Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 276.

³Herbert E. Fleming, Magazines of a Market-Metropolis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), p. 798.

⁴Ibid., p. 797.

⁵Ibid., p. 801.

⁶"If the magazine had the defects of its qualities, the qualities themselves were strong enough to carry it through. Yet it never took itself too seriously, and its alert enthusiasm was

the magazine came to an end and turned its subscription list over to the Dial, another Chicago semi-monthly periodical.¹ Fleming says that one of the principal reasons for its decrease was that it had said scorching things about books from every leading publishing house, and consequently could not get advertising.²

The distinctive appearance of the magazine set the style for periodicals of its class. The paper was heavy and cream-colored, with roughly cut edges. Color and ornamented capitals were used tastefully. The title page was rubricated, with a quaintly set, and curiously worded sub-title, and a woodcut representing an eighteenth century gentleman with stock, stick, and monocle. The art work, chiefly black and white drawings, showed consistently the influence of the English illustrators, particularly Beardsley. Drawings by Beardsley himself sometimes appeared.³ The indebtedness of the artists to Beardsley was admitted frankly, as in the case of the drawing by Frank Hazenplug of a clown playing a guitar as a masked woman dances or sings, "with apologies to Mr. Beardsley."⁴ A drawing by Claude F. Bragdon called "The Decadent Muse" depicted a poet sitting with pen in one hand, a cigarette and a wine-glass in the other. The "muse" hovering over him is a skeleton with wings.⁵ The drawings of Will H. Bradley

combined with a kind of whimsical humor" (Lucy Monroe in the Critic, XXVIII [April 18, 1896], 280).

¹"So the semi-monthly Dial has absorbed the semi-monthly Chap-book. Well, it is the old story of the tortoise and the hare. Blend the chipperness of the Chap-book with the dignity of the Dial, and you have a good combination, and one that has my best wishes for its future. I have always had something of a weakness for the Chap-book, from the days when it began its career as a literary leaflet in Cambridge, to its later days of war illustrations. It has generally been bright and amusing, if not always respectable to its elders. But then boys will be boys; only some boys grow to be men, while others remain boys to the end of their days" (Miss Gilder in the Critic, XXXIII [July-August, 1898], 29).

²Fleming, op. cit., pp. 802-03.

³See the drawings, "A Drawing," on p. 108 of Volume I, "Masque of the Red Death," on p. 156, and also a self-portrait, "Aubrey Beardsley—After Himself," on p. 17.

⁴Chap-book, II (January 15, 1895), opposite p. 214.

⁵Ibid., IV (February 1, 1896), 284.

were used much by the Chap-book, Vogue, and the Inland Printer, and showed a decided Beardsley influence.¹

The Chap-book quickly drew the nebulous "Chicago group" about it and became its center. A series of "Chap-book teas" drew the authors and literary workers of Chicago to Mr. Stone's publishing house to look at originals of drawings and manuscripts and to talk shop. These grew into the "Attic Club" and then into the "Little Room" club. But far from being a local product of the Middle West, the Chap-book was during its short life perhaps the most cosmopolitan magazine in America. Stone was in close touch with Aubrey Beardsley and the Yellow Book coterie of London, and from time to time made trips to London and Paris in search of manuscripts.² The roster of contributors was nearly as distinguished as that of the Yellow Book itself. The British writers included William Sharp, Edmund Gosse, Kenneth Grahame, Israel Zangwill, John Davidson, William Ernest Henley, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. B. Marriott Watson, William Canton, Norman Gale, Max Beerbohm, F. Frankfort Moore, Arthur Morrison, H. G. Wells, S. Levett Yeats, Katherine Tynan Hinkson, W. B. Yeats, Thomas Hardy, E. F. Benson, William Watson, Henry Newbolt, and Andrew Lang. From France came manuscripts from Paul Verlaine, Anatole France, and Pierre La Rose. Among the American writers were William Vaughn Moody, T. B. Aldrich, Richard Hovey, Alice Brown, Louise Chandler Moulton, and Richard Henry Stoddard.

Not only sharp-tongued in its criticism of published books, the Chap-book set the fashion for the ephemerals of waging a guerilla warfare with other critics. Peck's Bookman was frequently the butt of its sarcasm. A Chap-book writer charged that an article in the Bookman for January, 1897, was plagiarized from the British Weekly of June 22, 1893. The Library Journal

¹See the article on the art of Will H. Bradley by Herbert Stone, ibid., II (December 1, 1894), 55-62.

²Fleming, op. cit., pp. 802-03. When the Chap-book announced that it would become a "distinctly literary periodical, with the highest standard of taste and judgment," Miss Gilder said, "Those are most excellent aspirations, but with the offensive Mr. Max Beerbohm as a star author, I cannot but question both the taste and the judgment" (Critic, XXVIII February 29, 1896), 150.

was ridiculed for saying that the tritest platitudes of E. P. Roe, or the most tearful sentimentalities of Mrs. Holmes were preferable to the "imbruted vulgarity" of Maggie, a Girl of the Streets, the "perverted hysteria" of A Superfluous Woman, or the "morbid unpleasantness" of Celibates.¹ This critical independence of course, brought reprisals. Elbert Hubbard advertised in his Philistine, "For Sale:—Back numbers of the Chap-book. Price, two for a cent—any issue desired."² The Boston Journal commented on the Chap-book's new price of ten cents, "A man can see a great many freaks in a museum for that price, and the editors of the Chicago semi-monthly should look to their rivals."³

Under the influence of Bliss Carman during the first year of the Chap-book's existence, the general editorial tone was that of the rather popular "escape to vagabondia," which came to be glorified to such an extent in the Lark. In 1895, however, Herbert Stone made it a strictly literary magazine, publishing both criticism and original work. John Davidson frequently contributed poems, among which were "Serenade,"⁴ "A Ballad of a Woman,"⁵ "Spring Song,"⁶ "A Northern Suburb,"⁷ and "A New Ballad of Tannhaeuser."⁸ There was an article by Stéphane Mallarmé on Arthur Rimbaud,⁹ and an unsigned article on Sar Joséphin Peladan, called "A New Chapter in Literary History Especially Dedicated to the Curious."¹⁰

¹Chap-book, VII (July 15, 1897), 155.

²Philistine, IV (January, 1897), 58.

³Quoted in the Chap-book, IV (March 1, 1896), 398.

⁴Ibid., IV (December 1, 1895), 82-83.

⁵Ibid., February 15, 1896, pp. 326-33.

⁶Ibid., May 1, 1896, p. 545.

⁷Ibid., V (June 1, 1896), 56.

⁸Ibid., July 1, 1896, pp. 180-87.

⁹Ibid., May 15, 1896, pp. 8-17.

¹⁰"They [Peladan's novels] are truly impossible books; read offhand and merely as stories they would not be uninteresting, but the constantly recurring mysticism, the introduction of unheard-of words; the androgynous and gynandrous characters all combining to force the author's scheme on one, do much to prevent any real interest. The series represents the worst of the decadent literature; its scenes are drawn from the lowest side of Paris and its pictures are revolting in the extreme" (ibid., V [June 1, 1896], 88-96).

Verlaine's poems, "Epigrammes,"¹ and "Moonlight"² were printed, and shortly after the death of the French decadent Mrs. Reginald De Koven contributed an article called "Verlaine:--A Feminine Appreciation."³

The firms of Stone and Kimball, and Herbert Stone and Company were, considering their size, more active than any other publishers in bringing out American editions of foreign experimenters. In 1895 Stone and Kimball brought out Gertrude Hall's translations of Verlaine, with illustrations by Henry McCarter. Before John Lane established his New York branch, Stone and Kimball published simultaneously with Mathews and Lane, of London, the works of the younger men, such as John Davidson's Plays. Masterlinck's The Massacre of the Innocents, and Fiona Macleod's The Sin Eater and The Washer of the Ford were also published before the firm split and Kimball went to New York. Later Herbert Stone and Company brought out such works as D'Annunzio's Episcopo and Company, Le Gallienne's Prose Fancies (second series), Hichens' Flames and The Londoners, and Moore's Esther Waters.

The next most interesting fad periodical was The Lark, issued in San Francisco from May, 1895, to April, 1897, by "Les Jeunes," and published by William Doxey, the proprietor of the famous book store.⁴ "Les Jeunes" included Gelett Burgess, Ernest

¹Ibid., I (September 15, 1895), 211. See the last stanza:
"Plaisirs des yeux, plaisirs de tête,
Qu'un vif orchestre exalte encor,
Donnez au vieillissant poète
L'illusion dans le décor."

²Ibid., I (July 1, 1894), 70.

³The writer says that both Verlaine and Baudelaire were the spiritual descendants of Villon. Verlaine in his youth became the reincarnation of Baudelaire, and was "the prophet and interpreter of woman." She quotes several lines from "Ariettes Oubliées" and says that he thoroughly understood woman, who "tasting but few of the actual joys, the triumphs, and the trials of life" allows her fancy to wander to the winds "from the harem of her slavery." ". . . he has written what will outlive his vice" (ibid., IV [February 1, 1896], 285-89).

⁴"By far the most interesting aspect of the question [the exhibit of decadent literature in the window of Doxey's bookstore] is the number of fin de siècle journals that have sprung up during recent years. They began with The Yellow Book, which sprang into life April 12, 1894, the first imitation of which in America was the Chap-Book, published by Messrs. Stone and Kimball, and which appeared just a month later than the Bodley Head

Peixotto, Bruce Porter, Porter Garnett, and Florence Lundborg. They were later assisted by Carolyn Wells, Juliet Wilbor Tompkins, Arthur Atkins, and Yone Noguchi. At first Bruce Porter and Gelett Burgess were co-editors, but after a few numbers Burgess¹ became chief of staff. The magazine was printed on expensive Chinese bamboo paper. The lines of print were not "justified" at the right hand margin, and there was no pagination. Like the Chap-book, there were decorated initials and a general appearance of hand-craftsmanship. On the cover was a quotation from Robert Louis Stevenson:

"The rose on roses feeds; the lark on larks.
The sedentary clerk
All morning with a diligent pen,
Murders the babes of other men."

In fact, the Stevenson-Carman-Hovey spirit of youthful hedonism dominated the magazine.² Bruce Porter's introduction in the first number was representative of all the issues:

Quarterly. Since then nearly every State has had its decadent periodical. Far and away the most amusing, the most curious of the whole series, is the Lark. It was brought into existence in May of last year. It is the reducio ad absurdum of decadence, and is a good-humored burlesque of the whole movement. It is a sixteen-page, ten-cent monthly, printed on a kind of paper more useful for holding tea than type. It ridicules the eccentricities of typography by printing prose as if it were verse. Its illustrations are exactly like the primitive wood-cuts of three hundred years ago, and it cultivates the gentle art of nonsense-verse to perfection. Mr. John Lane, we believe, is to publish an English edition of the Chap-Book. Why not, we would suggest to Mr. Doxey, find an English publisher for the Lark?" (Bookman [September, 1896], 8-9).

"It [the Lark] was a vigorously successful prose; a practical joke upon the public" (Pollard, Their Day in Court, p. 376).

¹"To get the 'bite' out of each moment and to provoke others to do the same—this was Burgess's particular preoccupation. . . ." (Claude Bragdon, "The Purple Cow Period," Bookman, LXXVI [July, 1929], 476).

²There was a Portrait of Stevenson in No. 2, June, 1895. In No. 1, 1895, appeared the following poem by Bruce Porter:

"Oh! the wide clean earth, and the shouting sea,
And the wind of heaven blowing free,
And the stars in their blue serenity!

"Then give me the girl who will walk the night,
And sing in the dawn from the top of the hill!
God be the priest, and the sun in the east
To witness for good or ill!"

A new note—some of the joy of the morning—set here for the refreshment of our souls in the heat of mid-day.

With no more serious intention than to be gay—to sing a song, to tell a story;—and when this is no longer to our liking,—when the spring calls, or the road invites,—then this little house of pleasure will close its doors; and if you have cared for our singing, and would have more of it, then you must follow us a-field.

For, after all, there is your place and ours—there you may hear the birds calling, and see trees blowing, and know the great content of the earth. Meantime, shut in the town, we shall blow our nickel pipe, to make you believe it is a reed, and that you dance, garlanded, to its piping.¹

Usually the entire contents of each number was written by the staff. There was evidently little or no attempt made to solicit contributions from known authors. Cartoons by Gelett Burgess, light poems, and whimsical prose narratives or sketches filled the magazine. Literary criticism was only incidental.

Although bohemian² and utterly unconventional in spirit, The Lark was the opposite of decadent. In a letter published in the Epilark, Bruce Porter said, "We demolished Decadence and picked Hope out of the dust-heap."³ In a satirical article on the wedding of Art and Decadence, Porter Garnett said, "One can recollect but a couple of years back when the adventurous Knights of the New heralded the dawn of a new era in Aesthetics; before the time one would not have adopted the style that has since come in vogue without jeopardizing one's character. . . ." The chief characteristics, he said, of the latest style in letters was Vagueness and Vacuity, Inconsequence and Pleonasm. Grammar and Rhetoric were tabooed.⁴

Catholicity of taste,⁵ an absence of moralistic criticism,

¹In No. 11, March, 1896, appeared a map of Bohemia drawn by Burgess. Bohemia lies between Philistia (with its city of Shams) and Licentia (with its Castle of Crudelitas) on the coast of the Sea of Dreams. Parts of it are called Pays de la Jeunesse (around the Cape of Storms from Philistia), Arcady, Veritas, Forest of Arden, and across from the Hills of Fame lies Vagabondia.

²March, 1895. No pagination.

³May, 1897.

⁴July, 1896.

⁵Even realism was given a passport: "But why try to set the limitation of art? Why try to say what the poet may not sing—what the painter may not paint? . . . living seriously, and following an art with sincerity—must bring us, at last, to Realism—to seeing quite clearly the whole round of the circle: Passion and Sin, Pain and Death, Love and Self-Forgetfulness, Independence and Joy—the eternal verities" (Bruce Porter in the Lark, May, 1895).

and an interest in the craftsmanship of publishing, inherited through the Chap-Book from The Yellow Book are the ties which connect the Lark with the present study in a positive way. Its blithe, irresponsible hedonism was a typical manifestation of one of the principal ways American artists and writers reacted to the same forces of materialism which brought on decadence in Europe. That the ingenious nonsense of Gelett Burgess should be attractive to numbers of people was disturbing to the major periodicals,¹ but the life of such a delicately fabricated protest as the Lark was, of course, doomed to extinction almost before it was born. The Epilark with which the venture ended its existence contained its obituary.

Along with the Chap-Book and the Lark should be considered Elbert Hubbard's Philistine, "a periodical of protest printed every while for the Society of the Philistines and published by them monthly." Elbert Hubbard had by early middle age produced a moderate fortune by manufacturing and had retired to live a life of travel and leisure. In England he met William Morris and became intensely interested in his arts and crafts movement. He returned to East Aurora, New York, bought some land, and founded the Roycrofters, an arts and crafts colony which, among other things, engaged in bookmaking. The first issue of the Philistine appeared in June, 1895. The plan of the editor was to issue one copy to "say a few things and then stop"; however there was an immediate clamor for more, and Hubbard continued, writing nearly all the contents himself.

Claude Bragdon has written,

The Philistine was entirely different both from The Chap-Book and The Lark. It made no pretence to beauty of typography and the cover of coarse paper was of the same ugly brownish green color as present-day army uniforms. It was the speaking-trumpet, so to speak, of Elbert Hubbard—"Fra Elbertus"—pungent, abusive, witty, knowing, and vulgar. Hubbard apparently dramatized himself as a sort of composite of Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Morris, but his chief claim to fame is that of being the Father of Modern Advertising. He had a perfect genius for publicity, smoking up other people's talents and throwing them away like a daily newspaper, accomplishing a considerable amount of good in the process, for to his vast clientele he sustained something

¹Bookman, IV (September, 1896), 10: "It is often asked if the Lark is to be taken seriously. It ought not to be taken at all, except by those who know intuitively its content."

of the relation of Chautauqua, disseminating about as rich a brand of "culturine" as the middle-class American stomach was able to stand.¹

In the first issue, Hubbard stated clearly the reasons for the publication: "It is because we cannot say what we would in the periodicals which are now issued in a dignified manner that we have made this book The Philistine. Philistia is a Land of Free Speech."² Probably Hubbard's own egotism and his desire to exploit himself contributed heavily as a motivation.³ His aim was a glorification of the "natural," which in his mind was far removed from naturalism. Beauty for him was not the elusive spirit pursued by Symons and Verlaine, but was identical with health and normal activity. "It is the business of the true Philistine," he said, "to rescue from the environment of custom and ostentation the beauty and goodness cribbed therein."⁴ Beauty and goodness he interrelated in a perfectly conventional manner, but he stated his creed with a pugilistic aggressiveness which gave it the semblance of originality. It is plain that he had no clear idea of the real meaning of the contemporary movements, as is shown in the following discussion of "symbolism."

The province of art is not to present a specific message, but to impart a feeling. If we go home from the Lyceum hushed, treading on air, we have heard Oratory, even though we cannot recall a single sentence; and if we read a poem that brings the unbidden tears and makes the room seem a sacred chancel, we have read Literature. . . . That which is clear is ephemeral. . . . The Saviors of the world all speak in parables. . . . Good work never comes from the effort to be "clear" or "forceful" or

¹"The Purple Cow Period," op. cit., 477.

²Philistine, I (June, 1895), 19. The twenty-four points of the creed of Philistia are stated in ibid., VIII (March, 1899), 97-100.

³Ibid., VIII (January, 1899), 33: "Beginning with the next number of this Magazine, I propose to write every article and paragraf in it, including advertisements and testimonials of Roycroft Books.

"If it were possible to secure anyone to write so well as myself I would not do this. But compare the signed articles in any Philistine with my 'Heart to Heart Talks' and see if you can blame me for the decision I have come to. . . ." He recanted two months later.

⁴Ibid., I (June, 1895), 20.

"elegant."¹

But his ear for phrasing and the unique experiment he was conducting in East Aurora won him many followers,² although as a force in literary criticism his weight was negligible, principally because he had nothing really original to say.

Like most of the "dinkey magazine" editors, Hubbard had no use for Harry Thurston Peck of the Bookman. Herbert Stone of the Chap-book was also a mortal enemy. William Dean Howells he caricatured at every opportunity. In one issue he quoted Stephen Crane's poem about the man pursuing the horizon, and said, "This was Mr. Howells proving that Ibsen is valuable and interesting."³

Unlike the spirit of the Lark and the Chap-book, catholicity of taste was no part of the Philistine's platform. Aggressive independence was, aside from an interest in craftsmanship, the only quality which the Philistine possessed in common with the other miniature magazines. Although essentially an intellectual reactionary, Hubbard continued long after the "revolt of the nineties" to pose as an independent and progressive leader.⁴

The two foremost "dinkey magazines" of New York City were the Criterion and Millie New York. The former, after an obscure beginning as a weekly in Saint Louis, was taken to New York in 1897 with Henri Dumay as editor. Its existence was precarious. Joseph Clarke replaced Dumay in 1898, and Percival Pollard, with

¹"The Rule of Three," Philistine, II (May, 1896), 178.

²"Octave Thanet" wrote in ibid. (March, 1896), 135:

"I'm glad I am a Philistine,
I wouldn't be no other,
For half the art that poses now
Is nerves and mud and
Bother!

"I like a clean and decent tale
About a friend and brother.
Neurotic dames and wandering flames
If I can skip,
I 'druther."

³Ibid., I (June, 1895), 27.

⁴The Anti-Philistine Magazine was started in London in 1898, but lasted only four issues. Hubbard called it a "wax-wurx dummy" and claimed that it stole his cover, motto, and jokes, "first diluting them to fill the large British ears" (ibid., VI [March, 1898], 137).

Vance Thompson, Walter Blackburn Harte,¹ and Bliss Carman rejuvenated it in 1900. After a year it "succumbed to the increasing cowardice of its business managers."² Rupert Hughes was connected with it for a time. The magazine retained the tone of a French review of the eighties, was held to be immoral, and was refused by libraries. "The new and the bold is to be upheld in New York," said the Chap-book, "and the delicate mystery of Bohemia is to be unveiled. . . . The Criterion is iconoclastic, sprightly, and fearless, which is very well. . . . It is also at times silly, rambling, very wicked in the Le Gallienne manner. . . ."³ The Criterion Independent Theatre was an effort by the same group to free the American theatres from the tyranny of the box-office.⁴

¹Harte was for four years assistant editor of the New England Magazine, in which he published several notable pieces of criticism, among them one of the first modern evaluations of Ambrose Bierce. Percival Pollard (Their Day in Court, pp. 323-24) gave high praise to Harte's book, Meditations in Motley, calling it the "finest book of American essays in our time."

"He [Harte] had the large survey, the incisive phrase, the relentless courage of some of the critical gladiators of old; but he lacked . . . the subserviency that would insure his avenue to print in the large manner, so he gave up the criticism that was his life, and drooped to journalism" (Pollard, ibid., p. 27).

²Pollard, ibid., p. 309: "Even in our small circle there may have been black or dingey sheep; but, in the main, we were all simply fighting for art and truth, as we saw them. On that staff of the Criterion were assembled, among others, such men as Vance Thompson, Bliss Carman, Walter Blackburn Harte, Chas. F. Nordlinger and myself. The paper had been put editorially in charge of an Americanized Frenchman, Henri Dumay, and he applied—for the first and only time in the history of American journalism—the system of letting each man write just what he chose to write. As a result New York had, for about a year, the first paper that had been able to 'make it sit up' since the earliest days of militant journalism. The paper had those qualities—on the importance of which in all critical writing I have so insisted . . . —personality and prejudice.

"Eventually the paper succumbed to the increasing cowardice of its business managers. But it had not been wasted. It had shown what was possible. Never again could the croakers say that what the French do we could not do also."

³Chap-book, VIII (November 15, 1897), 11.

⁴Pollard, op. cit., pp. 308-09: ". . . this effort to divorce our drama from the box-office had no other objects save artistic ones. Yet, had you heard the hullabaloo raised by the conservatives, by all the various partners in the league between managers, critics and newspapers to inflict an entirely commercial

Vance Thompson's bi-weekly, M'ille New York,¹ lived two short lives in 1895-1896 and 1898-1899. Like the Criterion, it was decidedly Gallic, endeavoring to preserve an air of smart bohemianism. James Huneker was a regular contributor of articles on music and art.

The other miniature magazines told the same story of brilliant revolt and short life. The Daily Tatler ran in New York for thirteen days and contained pasquinades on Aldrich, the Gilders, Woodberry, Brander Matthews, and F. Hopkinson Smith.² It succeeded another New York periodical, Tattle, which had run for five months. In Boston, Walter Blackburn Harte edited the Fly Leaf, "a pamphlet periodical of the new—the new man, the new woman, new ideas, whimsies, and good things," for five months before it was incorporated with the Philistine in 1896. After leaving the defunct Lark, Gelett Burgess, along with R. H. Russell and Oliver Herford, edited one issue of the Enfant Terrible in New York. They advertised that "no one, not duly appointed an Honorary Infant, shall be allowed to contribute, except on payment of the usual space rates (ten dollars a column)." "The Infant was born great," said Burgess, "but had oblivion thrust upon it. The public would not take it seriously nor humorously; they would not take it at all."³

East and West, a "monthly magazine of letters," published in New York, showed a decided Chap-book influence in its make-up. The Fad, "one of the Chip Munk brood, printed on green paper at San Antonio, "asserted that Texas had "more real, sure-enough Culture than all of New England."⁴ Fin de Siècle printed Verlaine's "Confessions" and was called "unspeakable" by the Nation.

The Chap-book inspired other Chicago ventures. The Blue

drama on the community, you would have thought we were nothing less than 'second story men.'" The Criterion Independent Theatre produced Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman in November, 1897, and the first American performance of Echegary's El Gran Galeoto. It intended to produce plays by Becque, Strindberg, Porto-Riche, Brandes, and Giacosa (*ibid.*, pp. 310-11).

¹*Ibid.*, p. 377: "They scorned the public so as to gain the approval of the few."

²Thomas Beer, The Mauve Decade, pp. 193-95.

³Quoted in the Critic, XXXIII (July-August, 1898), 13.

⁴Quoted in the Philistine, II (May, 1896), 200.

Sky Magazine, printed at "the house of the Blue Sky Press," 4732 Kenwood Avenue, was beautiful and quaint, with its small, deckle-edged pages, each paragraph indicated with a reversed "P." Thomas Wood Stevens and Alden Charles Noble were the publishers, editors, and chief contributors. Running for two years and a half, it published verse and short stories, mostly on archaic themes. Two departments were designated as "Stray Clouds" and "The Devil, His Stuff." In an announcement of back numbers, the editors wrote, "So let us mould the Spirit of our book: to bring sometimes the sound of old chivalric sound over sky-strewn waters tuning the Elder elemental note to the sweetest harmonies of the New."¹ Four O'Clock, a "monthly magazine of original writings," had as its motto, "Sincerity, beauty, ease, and cleverness." It contained good illustrations, done on special-texture paper.² The Chap-book contained some amusing quotations from the prospectus of a magazine called the Stiletto and the Rose. Whether it was ever published or not, is uncertain.

Every issue will contain three leading "heavies" dealing with vital questions of the day. . . . Romance vibrant with picturesque vitality will be presented, and the morbid studies of mind afflicted with dry decay will be shunned as the plague. Natural deaths will take place in its pages, but literary murderers having killed in cold blood will not find undertakers in us for their purple victims. . . . Poetry.—Only the best will appear in the body of the magazine. [The Chap-book says, "Where will the rest go? Will there be a supplement?"]. . . . Intensely vulgar efforts like "The Yellow Aster," where disgusting words are used with freedom, will not be touched.³

No attempt is being made to show that the majority of these ephemeral ventures were decadent in the continental or British sense. They are interesting in a study of the period because they show a phase of the American "revolt of the nineties," an attitude inspired indirectly by the Yellow Book and indicating an interest in sensational foreign literature. In general they exhibit a somewhat irresponsible hedonism and a perverse flouting of the critical opinions of the standard periodicals.⁴

¹Flemming, op. cit., pp. 805-06.

²Ibid., p. 805.

³Quoted in the Chap-book, I (October 1, 1894), 261-62.

⁴Pollard, op. cit., 377: "It was an interesting period, and, in view of the dominant commercialism of this later decade, somewhat pathetic to look back on. It had plenty of the follies of youth; but it meant real artistic ferment, struggling growth; it was a battle for new life in our art."

